

SPEECH OF THE BOARD'S PRESIDENT, YAIR MILLER
at the reception honouring
63rd ANNIVERSARY OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL

Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies

And our co-hosts this evening:

- Richard Balkin, President, Zionist Council of NSW,
- Dr Ron Weiser AM, representing President of the Zionist Federation of Australia
- Jillian Segal AM, representing President of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry

I welcome each and all of you, to this celebration of Israel's 63rd Independence Day.

We are honoured by the attendance of our special guests

- The Honourable Barry O'Farrell MP, Premier of NSW, Minister for Western Sydney and
- His Excellency Yuval Rotem the Ambassador for the State of Israel.

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

The Hon Don Harwin MLC, President of the Legislative Council

The Hon. Victor Dominello MP, Minister for Citizenship and Communities, and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs

John Robertson MP, Leader of the State Opposition, Shadow Minister for Western Sydney

The Hon. Nathan Rees MP, Shadow Minister for Police and Emergency Services and Shadow Minister for the Arts

The Hon. Sophie Cotsis MLC, Shadow Minister for Citizenship and Communities, Shadow Minister for Local Government, Shadow Minister for Industrial Relations and Shadow Minister for the Status of Women

NSW Parliamentary Secretaries: **The Hon David Clarke MLC**, **The Hon Melinda Pavey MLC**, **The Hon Matthew Mason-Cox MLC**, **Gabrielle Upton MP**

and other members of the NSW Parliament.

We are also joined tonight by: **Members of the House of Representative:**

The Hon Philip Ruddock MP, Member for Berowra

The Hon Robert Baldwin MP, Member for Patterson

Mr Alex Hawke MP, Member for Mitchell

Mr John Alexander OAM MP, Member for Bennelong

And a special warm welcome to our friend from South Australia

The Hon Christopher Pyne MP, Shadow Minister for Education, Apprenticeships and Training, Manager of Opposition Business, Member for Sturt (SA)

Other representatives of Political Parties

Consuls Generals and other diplomatic representatives of

Arab Republic of Egypt

Argentine Republic

Austria

Canada

Colombia

Croatia

Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste

Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

Federal Republic of Germany

Finland

France

Greece

India

Japan

Kingdom of Tonga

Malta

Mongolia

Papua New Guinea

People's Republic of Bangladesh

People's Republic of China
Philippines
Republic of Botswana
Republic of Costa Rica
Republic of Ecuador
Republic of Fiji
Republic of Korea
Republic of Peru
Republic of Poland
Republic of Serbia
Republic of Turkey
Romania, Royal Thai Consulate-General
Russian Federation
Solomon Islands
Spain
Switzerland
United States of America and
Uruguay

- 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, leaders and members of the NSW Jewish community

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.

Israel's Independence Day is a time to rejoice in the creation of the first Jewish sovereign state in over 2000 years. Far exceeding the dreams of the signatories of the Declaration of Independence in May 1948, Israel is a thriving multi-ethnic democracy, a haven of freedom, individual rights and the rule of law, and a world leader in science and technology.

We rightly celebrate these extraordinary achievements, but it is also a day to reflect on the challenges that are faced by the State of Israel and those who support it. These should be seen not only as challenges, but also as opportunities for establishing a path towards peace and democracy in the region.

We also pause to reflect on the captivity of Gilad Shalit, held for 1789 days without any basic human rights or access to the International Red Cross.

One of the most serious challenges is however one that cannot be seen in any sense as an opportunity. The current push to target the legitimacy of Israel to exist as the nation state of the Jewish people – the Delegitimisation of Israel - is a real danger that threatens to derail any progress in the Middle East.

Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair explained the two forms of de-legitimisation in a speech he gave last year. The first, he said, is the traditional and overt form, coming from those who openly question Israel's right to exist. For example, the threat from Iran and President Ahmedinejad, who routinely threatens to wipe Israel off the map. This form is easily recognised.

The second form, which is insidious and harder to spot, is the refusal to accept that Israel has a legitimate point of view. It includes judging Israel by one standard and the rest of the world by another, and criticizing it in a way that is not contextual or proportionate. Of course, fair criticism of the Israeli government is acceptable and at times, especially within Israel itself, appropriate. One need only look at Israeli media, universities and parliament, and you will see that debate and criticism is widespread.

But when the acts of Israel are disproportionately condemned while far worse crimes in other countries escape any scrutiny, when there are calls to divest from all Israeli companies, when right and left-leaning Israeli academics are boycotted and when Israel's position is given no consideration, then criticism stops being acceptable and becomes an attack on the legitimacy of Israel itself. That is precisely what the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Campaign, BDS, seeks to achieve and why it must be rightly rejected!

Danny Ayalon, Israel's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs wrote recently that it is extraordinary that many supporters of the so-called 'Arab Spring' have criticized and condemned the only real 'Spring' to have successfully brought democracy and freedom to the Middle East. He continued "... As of last week, the 'Jewish Spring' is 63 years old and showing no signs of weakening."

It is indeed disturbing that after 63 years Israel is the only nation state in the world today which is being targeted as illegitimate and being forced to defend a global campaign calling into question her very right to exist. Anybody who supports the global BDS campaign yet claims this is not its explicit aim is either totally naïve or dishonest. The BDS movement's founders themselves have unequivocally stated that the aim of BDS is to create a Palestine next to a Palestine rather than a Palestine next to Israel.

To that end, as a community, we would like to acknowledge those in State politics who took a clear and unambiguous stand against the attempts made by Marrickville Council and the NSW Greens to promote a boycott of Israel here in Australia and to inject its poisonous discourse of anti-Israel hatred into Australian politics. In particular we thank Minister Chris Hartcher MP, Luke Foley MLC and Carmel Tebbutt MP for their unambiguous positions taken prior to the NSW

elections and we thank you, Premier, for your prompt action in writing to Marrickville Council as one of your first acts after your election.

It was gratifying also that so many of your Parliamentary colleagues in the Federal sphere from all parties, including the Federal Greens, repudiated the divisive and dishonest call for a boycott of Israel and reaffirmed the consensus that has long existed in Australian domestic politics, and internationally, in favour of a comprehensive, negotiated settlement of the Israel-Palestinian conflict based on the principle of two States for two peoples.

Friends of Israel and anyone who supports liberty and democracy, values which are ingrained in Israeli society, should expose and reject this practice of de-legitimation. Only by doing this will Israel be equipped to build better relations with its neighbours, and to continue to thrive and flourish like it has done since 1948.

On his return from his first trip to Israel in 2001, Barry O'Farrell rose in Parliament to make a Private Members Statement and reflect on his visit. In his speech he stated that *"Israel is a democracy in the Australian sense, warts and all. It has a free media, it tolerates dissent, and it possesses all those institutions that make up modern, civil and open societies. Governments rise and fall peacefully through the exercise of a vote and not through the barrel of a gun."*

Our wish as people of goodwill and peace is that the Palestinians will soon be blessed with such a reality too. Once they, and indeed their neighbours in the region, have a leadership that can provide them with those things that Israelis, and we Australians, take for granted, there will be a real possibility for peace to blossom and for all people in the region to live with safety, security, respect, dignity and equality.

Please join me in welcoming the Honourable Barry O'Farrell, Premier of NSW, who will now address us.