

ISRAEL INDEPENDENCE DAY
Thursday 19 May 2011

Ambassador Yuval Rotem,
Yair Miller, President of the Board of Deputies,
Rabbonim,
Community leaders, parliamentary colleagues and my many friends in the Jewish community

Shalom!

Without doubt, as we joyfully celebrate Israel's 63rd anniversary, the best gift would be if that powerful word of peace was finally achieved – if Israel and her neighbours found true and lasting Shalom.

This is what all of us – along with the citizens of Israel and her supporters around the world – hope and pray will occur.

As many of you would know, I've had the privilege of attending this Yom Ha'atzmaut celebration for more years than I've been in Parliament.

Each year it has strengthened and extended my friendships with the Jewish community.

So tonight you may well ask: *Mah nishtana* – a question posed at tables around the world as the festival of Passover was marked. What has changed, this night, from all the other times I have attended?

The answer is that I've been waiting for this *mitzvah* – this good deed – to stand here as Premier of our great State and speak from my heart about another great State – the State of Israel.

Israel, whose history, from biblical times to today, has been characterised by its people's struggle for existence and independence and by their innovation and achievement.

I remember my visit to Israel and can vividly recall my experiences there

- standing in front of the *Kotel* – the Western Wall – in Jerusalem and absorbing its significance to the Jewish people;
- climbing *Masada* to learn about miraculous heroism; and
- spending time at *Yad Vashem* to sadly reflect on the incomprehensible sorrows of the Holocaust.

I was even offered the chance to experience the thrill of kibbutz life, to dance the *hora* – the Israeli folk dance – and to float in the Dead Sea.

If I had stayed any longer, I could have been adopted as a *Sabral!*

But I came home vowing that, when time and responsibilities allowed, to return to Israel with Rosemary, my *Eshet Chayil*, and my boys so that they could the wonders and culture I had experienced.

What impressed me were not just the places of biblical significance I had learned about as a child, but more importantly the vibrancy, the spirit, the dynamism of the Israeli people.

To them I say *Kol Hakavot* – well done – for they have built a tremendous record of achievement that would gladden the hearts of their nation's founders.

When we watch the TV news we see negatives – the pain and discomfort of Israelis who have suffered yet another terrorist attack as they seek to go about their everyday lives.

Yet when you're in Israel you see the fuller picture.

The enormous resilience and determination of its citizens. The ability to get on with their lives undeterred by the environment.

You see can see joy and contentment, witness the contribution that each and every one can, and does, make.

And you can hear spirited Israeli voices passionately expressing multiple opinions as befits a democratic State with a free and independent media.

Visitors to modern Israel can only be amazed by the spirit of her citizens and what they have achieved since gaining nationhood in 1948. – a United Nations decision of which both Australia and Israel can be rightly proud.

However, it's true as Chaim Weizman, the first President of Israel, said "Miracles sometimes occur, but one has to work terribly hard for them".

I have always supported the right of Israel to thrive within secure borders, and wanted her people able to live in peace and go about their daily lives as we can in this country.

From my on-going involvement in a wide range of Jewish community activities, I continue to admire the strength and beauty of Jewish traditions – the foundations upon which Israel is built.

Indeed, the paths of progress and the contribution of Australian Jewry have been proudly entwined since the coming of the First Fleet and this contribution in all spheres continues to be outstanding.

From the bipartisan support within Australia for Israel, we have much to learn and gain from each other, to share innovative thinking and encourage bilateral co-operation.

My government hopes that NSW will continue to strengthen and advance its bonds and links with Israel.

One positive example is the Israel Partnership Forum being held in October, hosted by Sydney University. It will bring together some of Israel and Australia's brightest scientists to discuss important issues across medicine and science, food and agriculture, energy and IT.

As a government, my colleagues and I want to encourage further growth in trade and investment between our two countries, particularly with Israel's cutting-edge achievements in water conservation, irrigation and recycling – advances which benefit us all.

Ladies and gentleman, we all share this *nachas* – this joy – of *Yom Ha'atzmaut* – Israel's Independence Day. As a celebration, not just for the citizens of Israel, but a *simcha* – a major event – in the Jewish calendar all over the world.

Let us celebrate Israel's 64th anniversary next year with the knowledge that true peace and harmony has really been achieved, so that Israel can continue to make its significant and valuable contribution to the world.

Please join me in proposing this toast and wish Israel

a hearty Mazeltov – congratulations on so many achievements.

L'Chaim to the President and the people of the State of Israel.

Am Yisroel Chai – the nation of Israel lives.

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