

Remarks by Robin Margo S.C., President of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies, on the occasion of a reception on 30 October 2009 by the Speaker, the Hon. Richard Torbay MP, to mark the 35th anniversary of the presentation of the Mace by the Board to the NSW Legislative Assembly.

The Hon. Richard Torbay, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly

The Hon John Aquilina, Leader of the House

The Hon Barry O'Farrell, Leader of the Opposition

Mr Andrew Stoner, Leader of the Nationals

Ministers, Shadow Ministers, Members of Parliament from all parties

Mr Russell Grove, the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly

Ms Rhonda Miller, Serjeant-at-Arms and, of no small importance on an occasion like this, the bearer of the Mace

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

Gerry Levy, Justice Stephen Rothman and Peter Wertheim, former Presidents of the Board of Deputies

Learned Rabbis

Dedicated leaders, past and present, of Jewish communal, religious, welfare, cultural, social, charitable and Zionist organisations in New South Wales

Distinguished guests

We gratefully acknowledge, and pay respect, to the elders and people, past and present, of the Gadigal Clan, one of the 29 clans of the Eora Nation, traditional owners of the land on which we gather this morning, and which, with other lands of the First Australians, has afforded our community refuge and a home.

It was Sir Asher Joel's suggestion that resulted, 35 years ago, in the presentation of the Mace to the Legislative Assembly by the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies and we are delighted that Lady Joel is present today, with other members of the Joel family, Dr Michael and Mrs Anna Joel, Alexandra Joel, Natasha Joel, Bennet Mason and Sir Asher's great grandson, Oscar Asher Deutsch.

The NSW Jewish Board of Deputies was then, as it has been for 64 years and remains today, the democratically elected representative body of the Jewish community of New South Wales, and provider in turn of this State's representatives to the Executive Council of Australian Jewry. The Mace was therefore presented by the Board on behalf of all the Jews in New South Wales.

Our community is a small one in numbers but Jews have been here since the first Fleet and over the years New South Wales and Australia have given asylum and safe 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.
- And we find comfort and some pride in the fact that members of our community have used that privilege to contribute in many ways, and together with our fellow citizens of many different faiths and cultures, to the building of New South Wales and Australia.

That is what the Mace symbolises for us,

- a Parliamentary democracy of free citizens, upholding in this beautiful Southern Continent values that men and women who came before us, both indigenous and from other lands, fought and died for
- and the opportunity, indeed duty, to participate fully in the life of our State and country.

We are a people with long memories, Mr Speaker, and we thank you and your colleagues most sincerely for your remembrance of our gesture on the sesqui-centenary of the establishment of parliamentary institutions and functions in Australia. May all our children, and our children's children, continue to be blessed by this heritage.