



PRIME MINISTER

TWENTY-FOURTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL MEETING

Melbourne

23 April 1972.

Speech by the Prime Minister, The Rt Hon. William McMahon, C.H., M.P.

Mr President, Members of the Executive of the Zionist Federation of Australia and New Zealand, and all of you who have come to commemorate the Twenty-fourth Anniversary of the Proclamation of the Independent State of Israel:

I am honoured to be your guest today. Some people will say I came here tonight to demonstrate clearly that there was no hint of bigotry or discrimination associated with me. There is a simple answer. It is true and correct.

Australian Jewry has always treasured the absence of discrimination and anti-semitism, and the traditions of freedom and democracy in Australia. I have always treasured those principles and I always will treasure them. I am here this evening to renew that commitment on my own behalf, on behalf of our Government, on behalf of the National Government and, I am absolutely certain, on behalf of the great majority of all Australians.

All the world knows the story of the miracle of modern Israel. Israel is a haven for the oppressed and unfortunate. It is the champion of Jewish rights and of the right of survival, wherever they are threatened. And it preserves the historical identity of the Jewish people, through its cultivation of their spiritual and cultural heritage. So this is a proper occasion to remind ourselves of the prophetic visions of justice and peace upon which the State of Israel is founded, and by which it is guided. The story of Israel is unique in our generation, which has seen the emergence of so many new nation states.

There is no other example of a people who, having lost their independence and become widely dispersed in foreign lands, have been able, twenty centuries later, to come together to form a nation state. It is living testimony of faith, vitality, and determination. It is a reminder that forbearance, courage, resolution and industry can prevail during the darkest night. There is no braver nor prouder story than the record of Jewish history. It is a story of sadness and of unbelievable triumph. It is a story which is still unfolding in Israel where a strong and independent modern state has been built by Jews in the land of their fathers.

Through sheer hard work and the clever application of scientific knowledge, an arid and exhausted land has been restored and made productive... this was eloquently and felicitously expressed with masterful understatement by Winston Churchill in Jerusalem more than fifty years ago in speaking of the beginnings of the new Israel: "It is making two blades of grass grow where one grew before". This prophecy has been fulfilled. The grass is green in Israel today. The desert is blooming.

Australians have not forgotten the evils that shamed humanity which were revealed following the second world war. They have not forgotten the victimisation, the persecution, the massacres and the injustices which would have broken and overcome a lesser people. It is this imperishable spirit and this irresistible urge for freedom and independence which we salute tonight from one young and free nation to another. Our two countries have many links which bind us closely. In two world wars, a warm relationship was built up between the Jewish population of Palestine - and our own fighting men. This is a relationship forged in war that has continued undiminished and which I know will endure and grow.

Through its active membership of the United Nations Palestine Commission and the General Assembly, Australia helped the modern state of Israel to take its place as a nation in 1948. Since then, we have consistently supported Israel's right to exist, along with all other states in the Middle East. We have backed Israel as a sovereign independent state with a right to exist within secure and recognised boundaries free from threats or acts of force. It is one of the tragedies of our time that the issues which divide Israel from its Arab neighbours still remain unresolved. The major influences on events in the Middle East are exercised by countries other than Australia. But we, in this country, have emphasised both in the United Nations, and anywhere else where our voice is heard, that Australia stands ready to support any constructive efforts designed to further a negotiated settlement. We continue to hope that good sense and moderation will prevail.

Mr President, it has also been put to me that you support an immediate start to meaningful dialogue between the Arab States and Israel. And, further, that such a dialogue should lead to a just settlement of the Middle East conflict, based firstly on secure and defensible borders, and on mutual recognition and dignity. It is said that such a settlement would once and for all remove the dread of war from the Middle East in the interests of world peace and the co-operative development of this important region of the world. And I might add, it would be a settlement of immeasurable benefits to men and women of all nations in that area.

That is what has been put to me as your position. It is a position with which I must say I agree add support as a constructive attitude. Peace in the Middle East is not only in the interests of those nations who live there. It is in the interests of the world, and it is in the interests of Australia. I am proud to be Prime Minister of a country where men accept each other for what they are and where bigotry has no place.

Over many years, this country has been sympathetically concerned with the plight of Jewish people in countries where they have been subject to discrimination and oppression. For some of those who have been able to emigrate, we have gladly provided a new home. We believe others who wish to emigrate from countries where they feel unwanted should be allowed to do so. And I mention particularly the struggle of Soviet Jewry to live in freedom with the right to cherish their culture and tradition, and their struggle for freedom to return to the land of their forefathers in Israel if they wish to do so.

Australia has cause to be thankful to its Jewish community for its significant contribution to our society and national life. You have added the weight of your faith to the spiritual life of this nation. You have given much to our own culture. You have given your skills to business and commerce. You have given us notable leaders in war and peace.

I take three names only from our history; names that are honoured for the diversity of their contributions to our national life. There are, of course, many others. Firstly, the late Sir Isaac Isaacs, our first Australian-born Governor-General. He was a man of the law and of letters and of politics who helped to draft the Australian Constitution by which we live today; a Chief Justice of the Commonwealth and before that a Cabinet Minister.

Then there was the late General Sir John Monash, a Jew by race and faith, who was one of our greatest Australians. He led us superbly in war; he was an innovator in peace; he was warrior, academic, administrator and the first president of the Australian Zionist Federation.

And lastly, the late I. H. Boas, son of the first Rabbi for the Jewish community in South Australia. A scientist who made a dramatic contribution to Australian industry by pioneering the use of our native gum tree and the eucalypt, in paper-making. He served Israel, too, with his special genius. You honour him with the Boas Institute of Forest Products in Israel. Part of a giant industry is his monument in Australia today.

These men adorn the Australian story and there are many more of Jewish faith, living and dead. Their lives are fine examples of the way in which the Jewish community enriches the quality of Australian life. We will continue to be enriched if we remain one people - of several faiths certainly - but united by a common purpose and sharing the same dangers and the same opportunities. And I say to you with all the sincerity of which I am capable: I will repudiate and reject any hint of anti-semitism as disgraceful and unworthy of any Australian. I have nothing but contempt for any Australian who would stoop to such statements or behaviour.

Mr President, as Israel stands on the threshold of its 25th year, I am most honoured that you have included me on this occasion. Together we share in the pride of achievement by Israel. It is the hope of all of us that a just and lasting peace will be achieved before we next meet to commemorate this great anniversary.
