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## PRIME MINISTER

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**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER  
CELEBRATION FOR FORMER REFUSENIKS  
MELBOURNE - 17 MAY 1988**

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Isi Leibler,  
Edgar Bronfman, President World Jewish Congress,  
Ladies and gentlemen

At 5.15 pm on December 2nd last year Hazel and I were just preparing to leave the State guest house in Moscow to drive to the airport with Soviet Prime Minister Ryzhkov for our return to Australia. The phone rang with a message that the personal emissary of Mikhail Gorbachev was on his way to see me.

Perhaps you can begin to imagine the emotion I felt when the messenger told me that Mr Gorbachev personally authorised him to say that Rosa and Alex Ioffe and their daughter Anna and Marta and Pavel Abramovich - five on the list I had presented to the Secretary General - were to be allowed to leave the Soviet Union.

Naturally my thoughts flashed back nine years, to 1979, to the time of high hopes at the end of my previous visit followed by the agonising despair of dashed expectations. And perhaps you can understand that I allowed myself the luxury of a little exultation at a mission, long frustrated, now partly accomplished.

But overwhelmingly my friends, my feelings then, as are yours tonight, were of unqualified joy for the bravest of people. Nothing can eclipse for me, for you, the sheer joy and sense of relief that we all feel now at seeing so many friends, so many brave people, and knowing that they have at last been permitted to live in freedom.

These five had been among some thirty Refuseniks who attended a memorable reception held that morning at the Australian Embassy.

At that reception it was Alexander Lerner, whom I met in such frustrating circumstances in 1979, who spoke on behalf of the Refuseniks.

006454

His were the words of a brave and selfless man. By acting as spokesman over the years, Alexander Lerner had helped the general cause at considerable risk to his own interests.

Tonight I want to thank him again for his inspiring words of hope on that occasion - a message which I know inspired Hazel and me and all the members of the travelling party.

And I want to say publicly that, even though it is now 1988 rather than 1979, even though nine years have passed since I first believed Alexander Lerner would be free, it is still a precious pleasure to welcome him to Australia tonight.

I should mention also Yosef and Inna Begun, who had been Refuseniks since 1971 and who, though granted permission to leave, stayed until their son could also leave. Anna and Alexander Kholmyansky and Elena and Vladimir Prestin were also at the Embassy reception. Elena and Vladimir had already received permission to leave and I am delighted that Anna and Alexander subsequently did so.

Leonid and Ludmilla Volvovsky and Maria and Vladimir Slepak are also very welcome guests tonight.

But there is one further piece of good news with which some of you may not yet be familiar.

Among the guests at that Embassy reception were Isolde and Vladimir Tufeld.

Isolde, as you know, was very ill, and she has since been given permission to get medical treatment in the United States.

I have continued to make representations on their behalf.

I was delighted to be informed last week by the Soviet Embassy in Canberra that Vladimir Tufeld has been given permission to join his wife in the United States. I know I speak for all of us when I express my relief and appreciation at their release.

Our sense of joy for those I have mentioned, for all those who are with us tonight, is of course tinged with sadness - for we all know those many more who deserve to be here but who are still denied the basic human right to emigrate.

As we embrace with you in joy tonight so too do we remember those in sorrow.

My friends, it is sensible to ask ourselves why it is possible both to have this occasion for celebration and, cautiously, to think with some degree of hope for those others whom, as I say, we also remember tonight.

First, and above all else, is the continuing indomitable splendour of the human spirit displayed by the Lerner, the Prestin, the Begun, the Slepak, the Ioffe, the

Abramoviches and their kind. If in the darkest days, they had given up hope, no other force would have availed. Their strength, their courage, their determination has been the foundation on which everything else has been developed.

Second, there has been the sustained and principled support and commitment of the world Jewish community, through leaders like Edgar Bronfman, for their brothers and sisters in the Soviet Union.

In this effort, the Australian Jewish community can take great pride in what it has done. I want to pay particular tribute to Isi Leibler for his personal efforts over many years. I venture to say, Isi, that nobody has made a greater individual contribution than have you.

Third, that we are able to meet tonight in celebration and hope is a tribute to the way in which a number of Western countries, including Australia, have placed the issue of human rights, including the situation of Soviet Jews, not at the periphery but in the mainstream of their relations with the Soviet Union.

Speaking for Australia, both Bill Hayden - as he did in Moscow in 1984 - and I have raised these issues with Soviet diplomatic representatives in Canberra and with the Soviet Foreign Minister, Mr Shevardnadze, on his visit to Australia in March last year.

Joan Child, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, on her visit to the Soviet Union in July 1986, presented a list of Refuseniks to the Chairman of the Council of Nationalities of the Supreme Soviet.

And, as you know, the issue was a central part of my discussions with General Secretary Gorbachev last year. I presented Mr Gorbachev with a list of special cases which we believed warranted particular attention.

I used the words "speaking for Australia" deliberately, because I have been gratefully conscious that when I and my colleagues have been making these representations I know that I have been speaking with the full support of the Opposition and the overwhelming majority of the Australian people.

The United States, too, has been at the forefront on this matter. In a recent speech my friend Secretary of State George Shultz noted that human rights and humanitarian issues had become an established and regular part of US-Soviet negotiations.

He described his latest talks with his counterpart, Mr Shevardnadze, as the most searching set of discussions ever on human rights.

Fourth, there is no doubt that our capacity to advance this cause is, in large part, a function of changes in the Soviet

006456

Union associated with the Gorbachev era. Tonight is not the occasion to dwell at length upon the enormous complexities and implications of these changes but certain things should be said.

The new Soviet leadership is not about the creation of a western style liberal democracy. But it is about attempting to embark on a massive, and certainly overdue, reform of the Soviet economy. The concepts of perestroika and glasnost are instruments of that intention and process of reform.

There is a recognition by the Soviet leadership that effective internal economic reform cannot ultimately occur without the Soviet Union becoming an organic part of the international division of labour.

Implicit in this is their understanding that the necessary degree of international economic integration cannot occur without a corresponding measure of political accommodation.

The Washington Summit between Mr Gorbachev and President Reagan, their signing of the INF Treaty, the impending withdrawal from Afghanistan and the upcoming Moscow Summit are all signs that we may be entering a significant new era of East-West communication in which hostility is replaced with a constructive willingness to negotiate.

So clearly, we are seeing a period of very important, and fascinating, change in the Soviet Union.

We should recognise the connection that appears to exist between progress on human rights and the development of a constructive dialogue on broader issues between East and West.

In the Gorbachev era, that dialogue has been unusually intense and generally positive.

In approaching human rights issues, Mr Gorbachev and his colleagues appear to be serious about minimising impediments standing in the way of a closer relationship with the West.

That is why Australia and other Western countries were right in putting human rights at the centre of their dialogue with the Soviet Union.

I believe we should respond positively, constructively and, in the light of history, with appropriate caution to this new, and in so many ways promising Gorbachev era. We would be churlish if we did not recognise the advances, naive if we ignored this need for caution.

In human rights as in all areas of our relationship with the Soviet Union, we will judge them by their actions, not simply by their words.

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Australia will continue to press the Soviet Union on individual Refusenik cases.

As George Shultz put it in his talks with Mr Shevardnadze, we want to see a situation where emigration is handled according to established and legal arrangements and not, in his words, according to the whim of the moment.

My friends,

Those with whom we celebrate tonight have achieved their cherished dream in the year of the 40th anniversary of the foundation of the State of Israel.

Our sense of celebration is necessarily muted to some degree by our consciousness of the magnitude of the problems confronting the people and leadership of Israel today.

I do not need in this audience to reaffirm my strong and undiminished commitment, or that of my Government to a secure and peaceful Israel.

Last year, at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, I argued that now was the time for Israel, having courageously and successfully weathered the challenge of war, to face a different and, paradoxically, tougher challenge - the challenge of peace.

The subsequent tragic events in the West Bank and Gaza have further convinced me that the democratic, humanist principles on which Israel was built do not sit easily with the role of master of occupied territories and subject peoples.

The Palestinian in the occupied territories, as the Jew in the Soviet Union and the black in South Africa has his aspirations to be fully free.

The friends of Israel, around the world, are fearful that in a real sense we may be witnessing again after thousands of years a giant eyeless in Gaza. Is there not emerging the danger of Israel being blinded to the threat to its very soul and the vision of its founders?

I have spoken in Israel and here that the time bomb of demography is ticking away remorselessly. Within a generation, if Israel seeks to maintain its hegemony in the occupied territories the Jews of Israel face the certain prospect of being a minority in their own land. They will face the stark choice of being a democratic State or a Jewish State - they will not be able to be both.

This is not the time to rehearse in detail my proposal - outlined in Israel last year - for an international conference and an act of simultaneous mutual recognition on acceptable conditions between Israel and the PLO, as a basis for resolving the Palestinian problem.

Those conditions are that the PLO must recognise Israel's right to exist within secure and internationally recognised borders; it must accept Resolutions 242 and 338 as the basis for any settlement; and it must reject unequivocally the use of terror and accept the process of negotiation. In return, Israel would acknowledge that the PLO has a representative capacity.

I was very pleased to see that recently John Howard accepted precisely this formula.

Australia can speak to the world with a truly bipartisan voice on this important issue of concern to us all.

An international conference such as I have outlined offers the best chance of peace in the region.

It holds out the best means of avoiding further needless bloodshed and heavy handed repression in the occupied territories.

And it offers Israel the sure means of survival in the democratic Jewish form which its founders intended.

That form still inspires its friends around the world, no one more than myself. And that form still acts as an inspiration for those Jews in the Soviet Union who seek freedom.

Israel must not let that inspiration be dimmed.

My friends,

You have done me a very great honour by allowing me to speak this evening on these matters which are so close to my heart and which are so important for Australia's international relationships.

In particular, Edgar Bronfman, you have honoured me by presenting me with an award on behalf of the World Jewish Congress.

I want to repeat my deep appreciation for the unremitting efforts and support which the Jewish community and you personally, Isi, have extended on behalf of the Refuseniks.

I know well the overwhelming emotion which you are experiencing on welcoming Alexander Lerner and his colleagues among us in Australia. And I repeat that without your efforts, the results which Governments such as ours could achieve would be negligible.

My friends,

The story of the Soviet Jews is a human drama of vast proportions.

That is why the real guests of honour tonight are the heroes and heroines of this drama, the men and women who have endured great hardship and overcome years of injustice to be with us tonight.

I am proud, and I think all Australians are proud, to have played a part in their achieving victory in that struggle.

But it is their victory - they paid the price in the long years of waiting and the wasted opportunities - and they are the ones who with our best wishes are now able to live in peace and freedom.

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