

PRESENTATION OF A GOLD COIN COMMEMORATING
THE DEDICATION OF THE ANZAC MEMORIAL AND
FOREST IN ISRAEL

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MELBOURNE, VIC.

29 OCTOBER 1968

Speech by the Prime Minister, Mr. John Gorton

Mr. President, Your Excellency:-

I understand that at some later stage in these proceedings there will be a presentation of a memento, and I wish now to take this opportunity of saying how much I value the opportunity to appear before you and how honoured I am that the Government of Israel has made this occasion possible.

I would like, Mr. President, through you, and also Your Excellency, through you, to express to the Government of Israel my own deep gratitude and appreciation.

The Anzac Memorial Forest must, in a sense, be unique. There it is, part of a programme of transforming unproductive land to productive land, and yet at the same time a memorial to the 17,000 Australians who were in Palestine - as it then was in the First World War - and to the 70,000 who were there in the Second World War. Australians who on both occasions rode, if they were Light Horsemen, knee to knee with citizens of Australia of Jewish extraction and were helped by those of Jewish extraction in that country - a memorial to shared efforts, to shared dangers, to shared hardships so long ago.

I have not seen this forest, but I can in my mind imagine it - a vast stretch of eucalypts, bearing witness to those things which were together done, and reminding us of battles long ago. This must serve to draw closer and closer the ties between our two countries which are I think already as close as the ties between any two countries I know.

There is in some ways a remarkable parallel between the State of Israel and the nation of Australia. Both have got to develop and have developed in a harsh environment where nature is not kind, where there is no smiling way of developing, of growing, of building, but where what has to be attained has to be attained only by great effort and by wresting from that harsh environment the requirements for growth.

Both of us are, in the councils of the world, comparatively new, comparatively small, and yet I think both of us are, by applying scientific knowledge, by applying technology, showing what can be done in arid country, showing what can be done if effort is put in. And both of us require, and Israel particularly has required over the years, assistance from outside in the form of capital to enable the building of industrial muscles, the provision of a better life for its citizens to go ahead.

Certainly the area of your land is smaller than the area of ours. Probably, I think, the amount of good land that we have is perhaps greater than the amount in Israel, but having said that, still there are these shared problems, still there are these requirements for overcoming them, and that is something else we have in common.

That is not all. Though we in Australia and though you Australians have not ever had to bear the direct impact of totalitarianism, yet those of your faith have seen what can happen when people are prepared to give away their freedom, when people are prepared to allow an all-powerful dictator to decide their fates and their lives. You know it, perhaps at first hand, perhaps from stories from relatives or friends, certainly you know it, and while we have not had to experience it, yet we know it too. There is, I think, again a shared determination by the State of Israel and by the nation of Australia to see that there will never develop in our countries that kind of totalitarianism, and to seek to do as much as within our compass lies to see that it does not develop any further, that it does not spread any further. We have seen what happens to individuals when one accepts the doctrine which you and we do not accept that the citizen exists to serve the state and not the state to serve the citizen.

We have seen what can happen when religious bigotry or political bigotry, or racial bigotry is allowed to run riot, and that can only run riot if totalitarianism is in existence. That again is something I believe we have in common.

Of course you have difficulties in Israel, Sir, that we don't have. We do not have to plough our land with a rifle within arm's reach, we do not have to go to bed at night and bar and lock the doors or be careful that the lights don't so shine that a sniper may take advantage of it. We can use ploughshares alone. In Israel it must be ploughshares and arms. But we have as a nation, I believe, a feeling and a knowledge of what this might be like. We have an admiration for what has been achieved on the developmental and the economic and the defensive front in Israel. We have this shared determination of which I have previously spoken.

Now, Sir, may I add this. I believe that we in Australia have reason to be grateful to the Jewish community of Australians because they have helped in my view to foster the knowledge of Israel in Australia and draw closer the bonds between Israel and Australia, leading to that kind of genuinely friendly feeling which I believe exists between our two countries. The rebirth of Israel after 2,000 years though it was not easy has been, because of the efforts of the Jewish community in this and other countries, something in which we can take some joy as well as those of Jewish extraction.

We look forward as a government and as a people to the time when true peace will be restored in that area in which Israel lies. I haven't heard many people saying "Let us sit down and talk. Let us sit down and discuss" though I know, Sir, your own government wants this to happen. When it does and when the foundations of true peace are laid and when no longer is there a need for a rifle or a grenade to be within the reach of somebody ploughing a field in Israel, then how much better it will be for the human race as a whole, how much brighter and easier the future will be for a country like Israel so close in affinity, in its difficulties, in its desires, in its aims to Australia.

For these reasons, Sir, for the admiration we have, for the problems that we share in common, for the aspirations and ideals which I think are the same between Australians and Israelis, I am doubly honoured that today you have asked me to come here and talk to you. To you, Sir, the representative of the Government of Israel, and to all of you, who are not Israelis, but Australians of the Jewish faith, I thank you for the opportunity and express my gratitude to you.
