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PRIME MINISTER

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PRIME MINISTER'S ADDRESS AT THE OPENING OF THE SEPHARDI SYNAGOGUE AND COMMUNAL CENTRE, MALVERN, VIC.

It is a very great honour and pleasure to be here today to open the first Sephardi Synagogue and Communal Centre in Victoria. I have searched for other words to describe the significance of this centre, but I have been able to find none better than those used by Gad Ben-Meir in his letter inviting me to be here:

"The significance of the achievement lies not in the size or splendour of the centre. It is in fact small and modest, but in its being an expression of the opportunity our free country offers its citizens to maintain their age-old traditions and their religious and cultural individuality."

Australia has afforded this opportunity to people from every country in the world. In our age, when religious, racial and cultural repression still exists, this opportunity is by no means an unimportant one. But it has been the dedication of the Australian Jewish community, and of other ethnic communities around Australia to maintaining their heritage which has enabled the opportunity to be taken up, which has enabled Australia to develop increasingly as a multi-cultural society. In this process the Jewish community has played a major role. It has been one of the pioneers of community self-help, creating an important network of community institutions including schools, synagogues, newspapers, welfare organisations and sports organisations. These institutions have been of fundamental importance, both to the richness and diversity of our national life, and to the well-being of the individuals in it.

I believe that we are now witnessing an unparalleled development in community groups. This is particularly true of ethnic communities, which are committed to preserving their cultural, linguistic, and religious heritage, while participating in Australian society. The enhancement of Australian pluralism is a development of great importance which my Government is determined to foster and encourage. It has added a new dimension of diversity and richness to the traditions of those other ethnic groups - the English, Scots and Irish. What is emerging is a distinctive Australian culture, derived from the best all cultures can offer. Fortunately, the days of Anglo-Saxon conformity are over and I believe we are all better off - as a nation and as individuals - because of this. For those who do

value their traditions, the diversity of ethnic and religious communities provides the security and support which often is essential to effective participation in the wider society.

I am sure that diversity being a sound basis for unity does not appear paradoxical to anyone here. But it needs to be said that Australian society is not weakened, but strengthened, by diversity. One can love Australia and participate fully in Australian life, while preserving one's cultural heritage. The Jewish community in fact exemplifies the ability to draw together into an integrated supportive community, people of diverse linguistic, cultural and national backgrounds. Your own Sephardi Community is a clear example of this, as is this very synagogue and Communal Centre. It symbolises your commitment to maintaining the distinctive rituals, and the great traditional culture of the Sephardi Jews. Yet this commitment has been no barrier to your full and effective participation in the broader Jewish community, or in Australian society. She has the commitment of Australian Jews to Israel in any way limited their commitment to Australia.

The Australian Government's support for Israel is clear, and our stand is endorsed by the vast majority of the Australian people. My Government has stressed its continuing commitment to Israel's right to exist, and to exercise full international rights. We have consistently opposed attempts to exclude Israel from United Nations activities, and the grotesque attempt to link Zionism with racism. I imagine I am giving away no secrets when I tell you that the Israeli Government has expressed particular appreciation for Australia's understanding and support at recent international meetings, including last year's United Nations General Assembly. It is as old and firm friends of Israel that we express our attitudes on the Middle East dispute.

I said in June last year in my Parliamentary statement on the world situation, that the only future in the Middle East lay in negotiation. It is a proper and broad recognition of the rights of all groups within that region. I believed then, and I believe now, that there can be no ultimate victor. That compromise through negotiation is essential if there is to be any real settlement. Australia has long endorsed the agreed negotiating framework of UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. These provide for unequivocal recognition of Israel, as well as the need for Israel to withdraw from occupied territories. In recent months there have been moves towards renewed peace negotiations. Australia hopes that such moves will be pursued with determination. Australia's concern is that any settlement in the Middle East should provide the conditions in which Israel and its neighbours can live in peace and mutual respect. We have no sympathy with those on the Arab side who would wish to continue to reject Israel's right to exist.

Thus the present stated objectives of the P.L.O. as set out in the Palestine National Charter or Covenant, are totally unacceptable to the Australian Government. There have been some questions in recent months about the admission of terrorists to Australia. The position of this Government on the matter is categorical. No terrorist will be admitted to Australia.

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The increasing readiness of Arab Governments, particularly Egypt, Syria and Jordan to negotiate a Middle East settlement is encouraging. It should also be noted that there have been some signs of a move by the P.L.O. leadership, if not all the factions, away from its more violent objectives. We would hope that this move will develop to the point where the P.L.O.'s official policy of denying Israel's right to exist is abandoned.

It is my hope and that of the Australian Government and people, that it will be possible for our friendship with both sides in the Middle East to develop in increasing harmony.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is with great pleasure that I now open this Centre.
