



PRIME MINISTER

FOR PRESS

10 MAY 1978

ZIONIST COUNCIL OF VICTORIA
30TH INDEPENDENCE DAY OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL

It is a very great honour for me to participate in this celebration of Israel's 30th Independence Day.

It is just over a year ago since I last addressed a part of Melbourne's Jewish Community at the opening of the Sephardi Synagogue and Community Centre. On that occasion, I quoted the following words from Gad Ben-Meir's invitation. "The significance of the achievement lies not in the size or splendour of the centre, 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".

Much the same can be said of Israel. As a state, it is in fact small, but it stands in today's world as a beacon of democracy and freedom and its existence affords its people the opportunity and freedom to maintain their age-old traditions.

At the time Israel was recreated, the world had just experienced a war demonstrating the depths of man's capacity for inhumanity. The crimes against the Jewish people, the crimes against humanity perpetrated by the monstrous Nazi Regime, were one element in arousing the nations of the world to accept the age-old Jewish dream of a return to Zion.

There were other elements. I think of the pioneering work of those who had been returning to Israel since the end of the last century, returning not just to die there as had been done so often in the last two thousand years, but to live there and make the land live again as it had in biblical times. In the aftermath of the war many of the surviving European Jews turned their eyes towards Israel.

Although it was the U.N. which gave international standing to the Jewish State it was the courage and creativity of its modern pioneers which brought Israel into being. They made Israel a nation whose greatest resource is its people and their two thousand year old dream a dream whose realization we have been privileged to witness.

The Jews who emigrated to Israel and those who were born there are not however the only ones who have made a contribution to Israel. Australian Jews, too, have played their part in building the State of Israel and in providing it with the material and moral sinews of survival. This commitment to Israel has in no way qualified the commitment to Australia.

Australian Jews have found in Australia the freedom from oppression that is the right of all men and women, regardless of race, religion, and culture; they have excelled in all areas of Australian life.

The Jewish community has been a major force in this society -- creating a network of synagogues, schools and welfare organizations which have contributed to the well-being of our whole society. You have enriched this country, just as you have contributed to Israel.

Australia in turn, has not stood by as a spectator in the momentous events which have shaped the formation and survival of the State of Israel. The Australian Government reflecting the wishes of its people, actively supported Israel's creation.

Since the afternoon of the 14th of May, 1948, when David Ben Gurion stood in the Tel Aviv Museum and proclaimed the establishment of the State of Israel, Australia has had a firm commitment to Israel's right to exist and to enjoy full international rights.

My Government's support for Israel is clear. We have resisted attempts to exclude Israel from U.N. activities. We have rejected the repugnant attempts to link Zionism with racism. We will continue to do so.

Much has happened in this thirtieth year of Israel's existence. The most momentous event was, of course, President Sadat's visit to Jerusalem, where he addressed the Knesset and renewed his pledge that Israel and Egypt should no longer attempt to settle their differences by war.

In that one visit Israel achieved the implicit recognition of a major Arab nation and new and exhilarating prospects of real and lasting peace.

Australia welcomed President Sadat's courageous initiative because it represented the first real breakthrough in 30 years of continual warfare. It opened a new path which Israel has always wanted but which had hitherto seemed inaccessible; the path to negotiation. I have said repeatedly that the only future in the Middle East lies in negotiation.

The alternative of war has been with us for three decades. It has solved nothing, it can solve nothing.

In its first thirty years, modern Israel has demonstrated its courage, its capacity to survive against the odds, to achieve many things despite the threat of destruction, but the costs of the constant struggle for survival have been great.

The opportunity is at hand for the threat to be lifted so that Israel may turn its full energies to even greater achievements.

I wish the State of Israel and the people of the Middle East a fruitful, and above all, a peaceful future.

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