



PRIME MINISTER

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**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
OPENING OF THE ACT OFFICE OF THE
ZIONIST FEDERATION OF AUSTRALIA
CANBERRA - 21 NOVEMBER 1989**

It is a great pleasure to be with you this evening to open the Zionist Federation of Australia's Canberra office.

My Government and the Federation have always had an excellent working relationship, and although I would hate to think that at any time geographical distance might have constituted a barrier to communication, there is no doubt that the physical proximity to government that your new office gives you will make it easier for both of us to keep in contact on issues in which we have a mutual interest.

Looking back over the years, the Federation can point to a number of impressive achievements, examples of the constructive things that can be accomplished when Government works closely with community groups such as your own. I pay particular tribute here to the energy and dedication of your President, Mark Leibler.

In 1986, for example, the Federation drew to the Government's attention the difficulties faced by a number of Australians living in Israel who had acquired Israeli citizenship, not knowing that they would lose their Australian citizenship in the process. As a result, the then Minister for Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs, working closely with the Federation, was able to find a way to solve the problem satisfactorily.

The positive achievements of the Federation are also reflected in our social security system. German restitution payments to victims of the Nazi period are now exempt for social security purposes - a gesture of respect to those whose suffering we can never adequately compensate, but whose experiences we must never forget.

The Federation can also take credit for its active role in encouraging the Australian Parliament to pass its resolution calling for the rescission of UN Resolution 3379 equating Zionism with racism. Australia was among the first to pass such a resolution. It is heartening to see countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom, and the European Parliament, now following suit. Indeed the United States Congress passed a resolution based on the Australian one, a year to the day after it was passed in Canberra.

Australia has begun a dialogue with officials of the Soviet Union with a view to achieving a different attitude to this issue by that country.

As Senator Evans made clear in his statement this year to the United Nations General Assembly, Australia has consistently taken the position that countries should avoid using the United Nations to heighten differences or hinder the peaceful resolution of conflict with provocative resolutions such as this one. We must all hope that the changes at work in the world will soon lead to the rescission of this infamous resolution.

The Zionist Federation can be proud of its achievements over the years in speaking out on behalf of Jews both in Australia and abroad. You are no doubt as heartened - indeed excited - as I am by the pace of change in the Soviet Union and other Eastern bloc countries since Gorbachev's accession to power. The dramatic events in East Germany illustrate the rapid change now transforming that part of the world. It is change of a speed we could not have imagined as little as a year ago. But it is change that was inevitable, as declining Marxist-Leninist states began to understand the cost of the historical neglect of the fundamental link that exists between economic prosperity and political freedom.

The reforms now underway have had a particularly welcome effect on the outflow of people from the Soviet Union and other Eastern bloc countries. The Federation can feel proud of its record of pressure on the Soviet Union over refuseniks. Your efforts, letters, lobbying and meetings have now begun to bear fruit. More than 37,000 Soviet Jews have departed the Soviet Union so far this year. Last year the total was of the order of 19,000; in 1987, 8,000.

But we cannot rest yet. There are still cases which will require determination and energy to resolve. And your work with refuseniks will still be needed so long as there are such cases.

The reforms taking place in the Soviet Union also offer an opportunity, after so many painful years of uncertainty, for a full investigation of the disappearance of the Swedish diplomat, Raoul Wallenberg - who disappeared into Soviet hands in January 1945, after having worked through the war years saving the lives of tens of thousands of potential victims of Nazi terror in Hungary. One of the most moving moments on my visit to Budapest in July this year was laying a wreath on the recently unveiled, and very striking, monument to Raoul Wallenberg.

I am pleased to announce that in the current parliamentary session I will move a resolution which urges all parties to co-operate in a comprehensive and conclusive examination of the circumstances surrounding Raoul Wallenberg's detention and disappearance. After consultation with the Opposition Leader, Andrew Peacock, I am confident that the resolution will receive bipartisan support.

Australia remains deeply concerned about the unresolved problems in the Middle East. Let me state categorically we are committed to the integrity of Israel and its right to exist within secure and recognised boundaries. This goal we share. It must be part of any equation for a stable peace. The other side of the equation, as I have said many times before, involves the recognition of the rights of the Palestinian people.

The ultimate resolution to the problems of the Middle East will only be found through a process of negotiation. I hope that the efforts of Shamir, Mubarak and Bush will bring all parties closer to the negotiating table and a lasting peace for the region.

I talked to Secretary of State James Baker during his recent visit to Australia and was impressed by his commitment to facilitating negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. Such negotiations could lay the groundwork for elections in the Occupied Territories and, in the longer run, a lasting peace.

We are living at a time of rapid change. Global tensions have eased and changes, both inside and outside Israel, are creating an impetus for compromise and negotiation. Israel has demonstrated great valour and determination in war. In the interests of a lasting and stable agreement, I fervently hope that Israel will demonstrate the courage we know and admire in the interests of peace.

The Zionist Federation can be proud of its role in improving relations between Israel and Australia and in promoting informed discussion of the issues. Its conferences and functions have provided a vital forum for debate on those issues of concern to the Australian Jewish community.

The opening of this Canberra office will give the organisation a more tangible presence in the nation's capital, no doubt enhancing its capacity to continue keep up its good work.

I hereby take great pleasure in declaring the Canberra office of the Zionist Federation of Australia open.
