

HON BILL SHORTEN MP

70TH Anniversary of Diplomatic Relations with Israel

I thank the Prime Minister for his words.

I welcome the Ambassador and our friends from the Israeli embassy to the parliament.

And I recognise that many members of this house, on both sides, share a special appreciation of this significant anniversary.

Mr Speaker

In 1949, Prime Minister Ben Chifley said the new state of Israel would be:

“A force of special value in the world community”

70 years later, as we celebrate the free and prosperous democracy Israel has become, Chifley’s words still ring true: for our party, for our country and for the world community.

Chloe and I have had the privilege and the pleasure of visiting Israel on a number of occasions.

We’ve walked the ancient streets and marvelled at the research and innovation.

And we’ve been touched, every time, by the kindness and generosity of the hospitality.

Australians always receive a warm welcome in Israel, partly because the story of modern Israel, contains so many great Australian moments.

In 1947, the brilliant Labor internationalist, H.V. Evatt, saw Australia cast the first vote in favour of the new Jewish state in the earliest days of the United Nations.

The added significance of this moment was that it represented the first time Australia voted as an independent nation, a break from slavish adherence to British foreign policy.

As President of the UN, Evatt campaigned tirelessly for Israel's standing and independence, marshalling the conscience of the global community.

And, fittingly, formal diplomatic recognition and Israel's inclusion in the ranks of the United Nations came in the final week of Evatt's presidency.

So today's anniversary, among other things, is a reminder of Australia's capacity to be a constructive, effective international citizen.

But of course the shared history we celebrate today reaches further back than the UN.

I think of October 31, 1917, when the 4th Australian Light Horse brigade broke the Ottoman lines at Beersheba.

A famous victory: stockmen, ringers and jackaroos on their own horses from home.

A hundred or so skilled and brave Aboriginal horsemen, riding in the front line.

A stunning victory built on intelligence provided by a network of Jewish settlers in the then-Palestine - led by a botanist and agronomist, a young Romanian migrant named Aaron Aaronsohn.

These collaborators convinced Allied Command that, rather than sending the Light Horse along the sea road past the entrenched defences of Gaza...

...they could use a network of unmapped oases to come through the desert and outflank the Ottomans.

And just three days after that storied Australian cavalry charge, Britain issued the Balfour declaration, an international turning point in the creation of modern Israel.

I mentioned before the personal connection that members of this House, indeed many Australians, share with the people and the nation of Israel.

In particular, I acknowledge the members of the Jewish diaspora who fled the persecution, tyranny and atrocities of *Shoah* and built a new life here in Australia.

Our nation has been enriched and enlarged beyond calculation by their intellect, their culture, their hard-work and generosity, their philanthropy, their faith and love of family.

These are people who survived the very worst of humanity, who came face to face with unimaginable atrocity.

Yet what they gave to Australia was not a legacy of trauma or fear but a gift of hope for the future.

I know their children and grandchildren hold the memory of their ancestors' courage high, we all do.

Mr Speaker

Anniversaries are always an important time for reflection.

And the hard truth is that 70 years after Israel's recognition: peace and security still elude the region.

All of us in this place, support the right of the people of Israel to live safely within secure borders.

And as a true friend of Israel, my party strongly supports a two-state solution.

We expect the Palestinian leadership to recognise Israel's legitimate right to security.

And at the same time, we recognise the people of Palestine's legitimate aspirations for a state of their own.

This will take leadership from both sides.

To deal with the roadblocks to peace: from settlements to land swaps, to the fundamental propositions such as security and borders.

Mr Speaker

Modern Israel came about, in part, because of the success of negotiation.

Because nations found the capacity to sit at the table, find common ground, reach agreement.

We need to hold onto that hope and that determination.

And to look forward in the decades ahead, to a just, secure and lasting peace for all the peoples of the Middle East.