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STATEMENTS ON INDULGENCE

Australia-Israel Relationship: 70th Anniversary

SPEECH

Wednesday, 20 February 2019

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Speaker	Kelly, Mike, MP	**Question No.**	

Dr MIKE KELLY (Eden-Monaro) (11:41): This motion really should be about celebrating a wonderful history of bipartisanship in this country, and I acknowledge the efforts of the member for Kooyong in forging that bipartisanship aspect and relationship across the chambers in the years that he's been in this House. But every now and again we do see some attempts to politicise these things and it's unfortunate that we've just seen that recently, with the Prime Minister coming out in the media and attacking the Leader of the Opposition as not being a true friend of Israel. I would like to direct completely bipartisan comments to this motion, but I think I do have to reflect at this time on the historical background to this 70th anniversary. It's very appropriate that I do so.

The birth of Israel was effectively something that Labor was a midwife to, and it's an extremely proud part of our tradition. Doc Evatt was the chairman of the ad hoc committee. He actively, vigorously and successfully steered through that committee the support for the partition plan to create the original two-state concept, which we should have had back in 1947 had Israel's neighbours accepted it at that time. Doc Evatt put an enormous amount of work into that, and was widely acknowledged as having been someone who made 'a very vital contribution to the final result'. In fact, Michael Comay, Israel's rep to the UN at the time, praised Evatt for his masterly handling of the ad hoc committee.

It didn't end there, because it had to then get steered through the General Assembly. Of course, Doc Evatt ended up becoming the initial president of the General Assembly. He again masterfully put enormous effort into ensuring that that vote passed in the General Assembly. Australia was one of the very first countries to vote in favour of it, and is well remembered in Israel for that purpose. These are the existential issues about the creation of the state of Israel; this is where it really counts. It's important to note that in later years the then President of Israel, Chaim Weizmann, hailed Evatt for having played 'a momentous role in all the processes which culminated in the birth of Israel'. In 1965 *The Australian Jewish News* eulogised him as 'the man who piloted the establishment of Israel through the UN in 1948'.

At both of those steps—the navigating of the partition plan through the ad hoc committee and the General Assembly process, and later in relation to the recognition of Israel and its admission to the UN—the coalition opposition of the day, every single step of the way, bitterly opposed every step Labor made in that direction. The Liberal and Country parties that were in coalition as the federal opposition at that time were incredibly anti Israel. They were just slavishly following the British policy at the time, and they severely criticised our Chifley-Evatt government's support for that process. They in fact made some outrageous comments, which you can check the *Hansard* for. One of them was an outright anti-Semitic statement: the UN decision, they claimed, resulted from political pressure by American Jews and was thus illegitimate. Such a statement today would be roundly condemned, but that's the statement they made at the time.

The opposition also criticised the raising of funds by the Jewish community here, implying that it had been done under duress and could be used for anti-British purposes in Palestine. It was one of the reasons why the Jewish youth paper *Banativ* at the time praised Australia, which, they said:

… unlike Britain … is not lending her support to any plan of settlement which gives territorial concessions in Israel to foreign invaders …

Banativ also criticised members of the opposition who had attacked Dr Evatt for failing to follow slavishly the anti-Israel line adopted by Britain. These were the realities of the time.

The community in Australia was very much supportive of the recognition of Israel in its submission to the UN, particularly in those recognition arguments and debates that were going on, which as I said the opposition at the time, the coalition, opposed. There were leaflets supported by the trade union leaders, academics and clergymen published by the historian Brian Fitzpatrick in July 1948 calling on the government to recognise Israel. Of course, on 29 January 1949 the Chifley government announced that the Australian government had decided to give full

recognition to the Jewish state of Israel and regarded the nation of Israel as 'a force of special value in the world community'. That's the voice of Chifley.

One of the reasons Chifley and Evatt were so keen to do this was that the support that the Jewish community of Israel had given to our soldiers—including both of my grandfathers at the time, which I'm extremely grateful for, considering the suffering they later went through in the fight against the Japanese—was a very recent memory. That community provided extensive welfare arrangements and looked after our troops with great care. Chifley and Evatt were also aware that the leadership of the Palestinians, who'd let their people down severely at the time, collaborated closely with the Nazis. Haj Amin al-Husseini, one of their leaders, was in Germany helping to orchestrate the Holocaust at the time and recruiting for the SS. They were well aware of that, and it was one of the reasons why their attitude was shaped in the way it was.

Again, Britain opposed the de jure recognition of Israel, and the federal opposition at the time supported Britain in vehemently criticising the Chifley government. As I said, the Labor government also supported Israel's admission to the United Nations, despite, again, opposition by Britain and the coalition here. That took place on 11 May 1949 —again, through the fantastic and vigorous efforts of Doc Evatt, who became president of the General Assembly on 21 September 1948. When the foreign minister of Israel, Moshe Sharett, got up to make his acceptance speech of that recognition, he thanked Doc Evatt and described him as 'one of the foremost personalities responsible for the birth of Israel' and presented him with a certificate of the Jewish National Fund in recognition of his services to Israel. Immediately after that, they exchanged diplomatic missions. That was a proud tradition, a proud process, that had begun in 1947 and followed right through to the final recognition and admission of Israel to the UN.

Australia being one of the first countries to do that, the Jewish community here was quite concerned about the opposition positions on this issue. The *Banativ* youth magazine, which I referred to earlier, was deeply concerned in the 1949 elections about what the policy would become if the coalition were to win. They called on their readership to vote for the Labor government, which 'consistently supported the cause of Israel, Jewry, and the UN'. They warned:

… a Liberal Government would result in the growing tide of anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist feeling being heard more loudly in parliament, but this time from the government benches.

Those I would describe as bad old days. Look, we should freely admit to periods of Labor policy honestly, such as our support for the White Australia policy over time. It's important to recognise bad parts of our history. That was a bad time. I think members of the coalition will recognise that their position in those days was wrong. It's good to see that from the mid-fifties onward there was a deep and abiding bipartisanship, and we all know the stories, and of course Bob Hawke's efforts and the like, in getting Soviet Jewry out and supporting Israel.

Where we are today of course is moving the peace process forward. What we should be doing is looking for ways to make that two-state solution happen to deliver the final piece of this story. That's why we have issues with this decision about the embassy move. It was a clumsy attempt to intervene in the region, in the issue and in the process for the purposes of a by-election. It was not done in consultation with the Quartet, the stakeholders or the parties involved.

With a major diplomatic step like that, you always use it in the process. We could have gone to Israel and said, 'We'd love to do this, but we'd like to see more action on dismantling illegal outposts.' We could have gone to the Palestinians and said, 'We want to do this, but, if you, for example, would stop what's going on in the Gaza Strip with Hamas and its brutal treatment of gays and lesbians and women and its outlawing of free trade unionism et cetera, we'll only do this in the context of a recognition of East Jerusalem.' Those are the things we could have worked through, which is what I believe the Trump administration is doing at the present time. But, no, it was this ham-fisted, stumble-bum approach to getting involved in the intricate and difficult politics of the Middle East. So I would say: let's not try and play politics with this. We need to retain a bipartisan approach to this issue and to carefully craft our way through, using diplomacy, to get to that two-state solution, which we would really like to see, and in a way that helps the Palestinians build the mechanisms of the state and also encourages them down the path to being a democratic, secular state that respects human rights—and that is the objective of all of us. *(Time expired)*