Good evening.

Your Excellency, I thank you for the invitation to visit Israel to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the founding of your impressive State.

It gave me great pleasure yesterday morning on behalf of the Government and people of Australia to extend an invitation for you to visit our country at a mutually convenient time.

It is an honour for Marlena and me to be here, given that it is the first visit by an Australian Head of State to your country.

Our visit has already been both memorable and beneficial.

The ceremonies to dedicate the Park of the Australian Soldier and unveil the memorial to the Australian Light Horse at Be’er-Sheva were especially moving and a privilege to share with you.

And I look forward to meeting your technological experts in a few days to discuss the common environmental and other issues which challenge our nations and indeed much of the planet.

Mr President, I note that you personally have had a most distinguished career as a political leader, holding positions at all levels, both in government and in opposition.

You have been an author, a philanthropist and a Nobel Peace Laureate.

You have founded political parties and non-government organisations dedicated to peace and to progress.

Your parliamentary career, spanning over 45 years, ended only with your election to the high office of President in 2007.

You have been a driving force in encouraging ongoing engagement between Israel and the international community.

And you have consistently fostered a culture of innovation, particularly in tackling the environmental challenges that are so familiar to both Israelis and Australians.

Truly a man for all seasons.

Tonight, I congratulate the State of Israel on its 60th anniversary and reiterate the message of friendship and enduring support to your people, as encapsulated in the Australian Parliament’s historic bipartisan resolution, passed earlier this year.

The resolution commends the achievements of Israel in the 60 years since its inception and reinforces Australia’s commitment to Israel’s right to exist in amity and security, and Australia’s ongoing support to the peaceful establishment of a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
In his speech in support of the motion to the Australian Parliament, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd said:

“Over the past 60 years governments from both sides of politics have supported our strong relationship with Israel. That relationship is strong and it is deep – and it will remain so.”

I would like to highlight a small footnote in the history of our association which occurred on 8 June 1941, when the British and Dominion forces invaded Vichy controlled Syria and Lebanon, in which my own greatly loved uncle was killed.

I understand your celebrated former Minister of Defence and Chief of Staff of the Defence Force, Moshe Dayan, led a small group of Jewish guides across the border from Palestine into Lebanon to provide maps of the terrain for the invading Allied forces.

When speaking to his company, Dayan was heard to ask ‘Do you want to see the Australians fight?’

So the day before the invasion, Dayan and his soldiers joined a group of 10 Australians in an attempt to capture two strategic bridges on the coastal road about 10 kilometres north of the border.

During the battle, a stray bullet hit the binoculars Dayan was using, splintering the lens and metal casing, and causing permanent damage to his left eye socket.

So the iconic eye patch he wore, dating from his days as a junior officer, resulted unexpectedly from the cooperation between our two nations.

I am pleased to note that once the war concluded, Moshe Dayan was awarded the ‘Distinguished Service Order’ from the British Commonwealth on the recommendation of an Australian officer.

The pages of our shared history and cooperation include some significant entries.

Your Excellency, you will recall that Australia’s Minister of External Affairs under the Chifley Government, Dr Herbert Vere Evatt, chaired the United Nations’ Ad Hoc Committee on Palestine in 1947, which proposed the partition of Palestine into two separate Jewish and Arab states.

Throughout the crucial period leading up to the successful vote in November 1947, Australia, represented by Dr Evatt, steadfastly and publicly supported the establishment of the State of Israel.

On 29 January 1949, Australian Prime Minister Ben Chifley announced that Australia would become one of the first countries in the world to recognise the new State of Israel, describing it as ‘a force of special value in the world community’.

On 11 May 1949, the day on which Israel joined the United Nations, the Australian Embassy opened in Tel Aviv.

Our support for Israel in the United Nations continues today.

We support Israel’s membership of appropriate UN groupings such as JUSCANZ as well as other international institutions such as the Organisation for Economic Co operation and Development.

And I acknowledge with pleasure this evening that this support occurs both ways - Israel was very recently amongst the first countries to commit to supporting Australia’s candidacy in the 2012 elections for a non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council.

Our friendship with Israel is also reflected by our strong support for a two state solution to the Israel-Palestinian issue. For too long peace has eluded those seeking resolution of this tragic and ongoing conflict.

A terrible price has been paid by hundreds of innocent victims on both sides, including many women and children.

Australia’s objective is for Israel to exist peacefully within secure and internationally recognised borders.

Similarly, we firmly believe the establishment of an independent and economically viable Palestinian State must remain a key priority outcome in the Middle East Peace process.
We strongly support the ongoing negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority towards a final status agreement by the end of 2008, as launched at the Annapolis Conference in November last year.

I commend the efforts of Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas to reach a peace agreement.

It is essential that these negotiations continue to be pursued seriously both by the leaders and people on both sides.

We recognise that negotiation and implementation of an agreement will very likely involve painful compromises for both sides.

It will also entail risks and challenges.

Nevertheless, we urge both sides to seize the current opportunity to pursue peace in the interests of future generations and in the interests of world peace; to aim for the light on the hill and not be deterred or distracted from achieving such a noble objective.

And I recall Mr President the emphasis you placed, during our discussions yesterday, on the impact of fostering educational and economic relationships between all parties, to underpin the creation of a genuine, lasting peace across the region.

More broadly, we recognise the threat posed to all countries in this region by Hamas and Hezbollah. As I flew over Gaza yesterday, I reflected on how in Australia we would react if our citizens were under constant fire from their immediate neighbours.

We empathise with the difficulties faced by Israel and its neighbours in dealing with these challenges.

Australia’s immigration has a rich, multicultural mix and we have welcomed people from all regions of the Middle East to join us in peace and tolerance of other cultural and religious heritages.

We encourage people to bring their culture, cuisine, art, music and skills, but not their hatred.

The Australian Jewish community dates from the beginning of European settlement and the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788.

Starting in the period directly preceding the Second World War, some 35,000 Jewish migrants settled in Australia over the next few decades and established flourishing communities, centred in Sydney and Melbourne.

The Jewish diaspora have made an extraordinary contribution to the richness and strength of Australian society, including public service, philanthropy, business, the arts and the professions.

General Sir John Monash was an outstanding Australian military leader and both Sir Isaac Isaacs and Sir Zelman Cowen were distinguished predecessors of my office.

In commerce, names such as Marc Besen, Frank Lowy and Richard Pratt are recognised throughout Australia today, both for their commercial success as well as their generosity and philanthropic engagement.

The strength and contribution of Australia’s Jewish community has also had a profoundly positive impact on our bilateral relations.

Both through direct engagement of individuals, as well as organisations such as the Australia Israel Chamber of Commerce, the Australia Israel and Jewish Affairs Council, the Zionist Federation of Australia and the Australia Israel Cultural Exchange, the Australian Jewish community has sponsored many hundreds of missions and delegations fostering people to people exchanges, cultural awareness and the pursuit of greater knowledge of two way business opportunities.

Of course, the present basis of our bilateral relationship goes well beyond the Australian Jewish community and draws on our shared democratic values, our belief in a fair go for all, our cultural diversity, and our experience in carving out dynamic, vibrant modern states in harsh and challenging physical environments.

Australia shares many common environmental and agricultural challenges with Israel including limited arable land availability, water scarcity, energy security issues and the impact of climate change.
We have much to learn from each other’s expertise, especially in solar energy and geothermal power.

Your agriculturalists, including at the Vulcari Institute, which I will visit tomorrow, have led the way by pioneering agricultural biotechnology, soil solarisation, drip irrigation, and the use of industrial waste water for agriculture.

I am looking forward to touring the Bahan water treatment facility on Thursday to see more of this technology first hand and to encourage joint research and high level information exchange on this and other areas of mutual interest where Australia has much to offer.

I note that contributions from the Jewish National Fund of Australia have paid for a substantial component of the facility I will be visiting.

On the issue of managing our precious natural resources, we should take very serious note of the suggestion by the World Wildlife Fund that developed societies are already consuming around 20 percent more resources than our planet can sustain. Food availability and distribution is of particular concern.

I firmly believe that how we manage our vital, food, energy, water and other natural resources in the next decade will have significant security, economic and social implications for almost every country on the globe.

Science and technology will help to provide some solutions; but cannot provide all, and thus we urgently need to consider the social implications and adjustments that might be required if the world is to live in harmony with its very finite resources.

All nations must address these issues now or face potentially severe consequences in the future; perhaps the relatively near future.

Your Excellency, ladies and gentlemen.

On behalf of the Australian Government and people, I offer congratulations to the Government and people of Israel on this the 60th anniversary of the establishment of the State of Israel.

In the words of the historic motion passed by the Australian Parliament:

‘on this, the 60th Anniversary of Independence of the State of Israel, [we] pledge our friendship, commitment and enduring support to the people of Israel as we celebrate this important occasion together.’

We wish everyone here and the State of Israel a peaceful and prosperous future.

Thank you.

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