



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
VICTORIA

PRESIDENT OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL LUNCH

Monday 24th February 2020

Your Excellency Mr Reuven Rivlin, President of the State of Israel

The Honourable Daniel Andrews MP, Premier of Victoria

Your Excellencies Ambassadors Mr Mark Sofer and Mr Chris Cannan

Members of the Victorian Parliament

Major General Ido Nehushtan (Retd), Chairman, Israel Australia Chamber of Commerce

Mr Leon Kempler AM, Chairman, Australia Israel Chamber of Commerce

All our distinguished guests from Israel and Australia

First, I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land upon which we are gathering and pay my respects to their Elders past and present and to any Elders here with us this afternoon.

Your Excellency, I start with the heartiest welcome to you. We are delighted to host you here in Victoria.

You know of and I hope will feel the warmth of the relationship between Victoria and the State of Israel.

And, on a personal note, Tony and I are pleased for the opportunity to return the warmth of your welcome to us during our Official visit to Israel late in 2018.

Of course, we welcome all our guests from Israel, and hope that your stay is both productive and enjoyable. And then, of course, our local guests – drawn from our Israeli and our Jewish communities, (in both instances, the largest in Australia), and from many sectors of Victoria's thriving business community.

You will not be surprised to hear that I have long been alive to the challenges that your small country faces. Alive too to its manifold successes.

As I have mentioned before, my early appreciation of Israel's renown in agriculture was piqued when, as a very young lawyer, I spent some months in Kibbutz Sdot Yam on the Mediterranean Coast, helping to tend a newly planted avocado crop, one of the first, I believe, to be successfully raised in coastal soil.

That time in Israel had a considerable impact upon me - well beyond just learning about avocados!

It was some 40 years ago now. The State of Israel was still very young. The energy of the people was palpable, as was the sense of urgency in the building of a country and an economy.

Our visit just a little over 15 months ago now also had a considerable impact upon me.

I could never have imagined what could – what would – be achieved in just four decades. It is such a short moment in history.

Today, Israel is home to the highest number of start-ups outside Silicon Valley. You lead the world in your mature mechanisms for commercialising innovative ideas. Your venture capital activity is the highest per capita in the world. And you have some 80 NASDAQ listed companies.

During our Official visit, we were privileged to observe some of your developments in medical research and medtech, agriculture, irrigation and agritech, defence and cyberotechnology, as well as in energy and smart cities. And to be exposed to the clever ways in which you support innovation.

Just as I was struck by the magnitude of your successes, I was also struck by the commonalities of interest and the number of partnerships, collaborations and opportunities between Victoria and Israel.

We share a commitment to innovation and innovative ways of doing things.

For Victoria, a State without vast mineral resources upon which to rely, we have had to think creatively and work differently.

For Israel, that has always been the case, with the necessity to find smart ways to keep its small population safe and to devise ways to grow food in desert conditions to feed its people.

We see many significant business, academic and investment partnerships already underway. With the commitment of our Governments and the large number of inbound and outbound trade missions and delegations between us, we know that our shared interests shall continue to grow.

Your Excellency, although we wish that you had more time to spend with us in Victoria, of course we understand the time constraints on you.

We do appreciate just how well served we are by the Australia-Israel Chamber of Commerce and the leadership of our good friends, Leon Kempler AM and Major-General (Ret) Ido Nehushtan, and the Executive Directors Paul Israel and Marcus Mandie.

We are grateful too for the strong relationships forged in each country by our respective Ambassadors, Their Excellencies Mark Sofer and Chris Cannan.

That leaves me only to thank you for your visit, Your Excellency. To thank you for your part in the strong relationship between Israel, Australia and Victoria. And – in the words of Victoria's State motto – to wish you and the State of Israel 'Peace and Prosperity'.