

Good evening ladies and gentlemen,

I would first like to acknowledge the presence this evening of all members of parliament, the Honourable Mr Bob Carr, the Arab ambassadors, general consuls, and others.

A special note of gratitude is also in order for all the organisers of this year's Palestinian National Day.

This day is a bitter-sweet reminder of what we've achieved so far in the pursuit of self-determination, but also of what we have yet to accomplish – namely, an independent state on 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, and a just settlement for the refugees.

Today is also an opportunity to observe the 14th anniversary of the passing of Yasser Arafat, who declared the State of Palestine in 1988 and adopted the two-state solution as the core of the Palestinian national program by signing the 1993 Oslo Accords. Despite both the PLO's official recognition of the State of Israel in 1994 and the extending of the olive branch on multiple occasions since, successive Israeli governments, as you all know, have persisted in their project of land theft and settler-colonialism in defiance of international law and of the terms of the Oslo Accords themselves.

Now that the Knesset has passed the highly contentious *Jewish Nation-State Law*, there can no longer be any doubt as to the true end goal of present-day Zionism – an exclusive and 'greater Israel' that regards all of Jerusalem as its eternal and undivided capital, considers settlement expansion a 'national virtue', and, most significantly, stresses that the right to self-determination in the land of historical Palestine is limited to the Jewish people. Downplay this as one may – and as Israel apologists and lobbyists have frequently done – the weight of this legislation is not purely symbolic, but shall serve to legitimise and further entrench the status quo. All fair-minded and peace-focused members of the Palestinian community, advocacy groups, and of Australian society more broadly, ought to speak out and campaign against this discriminatory law as it further marginalises Palestinians and erodes a viable two-state settlement.

The Trump administration's blank cheque support of Netanyahu's right-wing coalition government (evidenced by the Jerusalem move, the withdrawal of all UNRWA funding, and the closure of the PLO's office in Washington) means that the impending and so-called 'Deal of the Century' will be anything but equitable. For all of us here this evening, the real and pressing danger is Prime Minister Scott Morrison's apparent preparedness to buy into these false arguments and to act in lockstep with the White House. His recent comments on Jerusalem (and incidentally, on the Iran nuclear deal) are evidence of this. As we very well know – and as any thinking person will attest – an embassy move will not bring a negotiated settlement any closer, but only legitimise the status quo, since Israel considers all of Jerusalem to be one and the same city.

Ladies and gentleman, I submit to you this evening that there is an alternative pathway in which Australia as a so-called 'middle power' can use what leverage it has to push both sides towards a durable two-state solution. Instead of emboldening Netanyahu's unilateralism and dissolution of Palestinian rights and identity, Australia could recognise the State of Palestine on 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, and, in doing so, restore legitimacy to and empower the weaker and exploited party. It will also signal Australia's refusal to accept any other 'solution' – especially a one-state and apartheid 'greater Israel', or a Palestine that is no more than a collection of several, semi-autonomous cantons. Now is the time to reaffirm Australia's commitment to the Palestinian people's right to the dignity of statehood, a right to which they are entitled. If countries like Australia aren't prepared to take this step, then there really is no point in continuing to pay lip service to a two-state solution.

Despite all this, Australia still maintains its bipartisan position of support for the self-determination of the Palestinian people, and has thus far refrained from moving its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. It has likewise continued its funding to UNRWA and to Palestinian civil society and development organizations, despite the ongoing pressure campaign to discredit and undermine the Palestinian cause.

These glimmers of hope are the reason why we ought to unite and coordinate our advocacy and lobbying efforts. Together, we have the resources and reach to be an effective counterweight against the pro-Israel lobby groups and their media outlets, which so often skew the facts in order to twist Australia's foreign policy arm in their favor. This has never been more urgent than right now, as we stand at this critical and unsettling juncture, still waiting for our independent homeland to emerge.

Thank you kindly for listening and I wish you all the very best.
