

**Good evening ladies and gentlemen,**

It is my great pleasure to be with you tonight to honour a professional journalist, a true intellect, a faithful friend of the Palestinian people, and a committed advocate of Palestinian human rights – Mr Antony Loewenstein.

This evening's attendance proves just how many people agree that Antony's extraordinary and tireless work ought to be formally recognised and celebrated. This year's al-Quds prize could not have, therefore, a more deserving recipient. Truly, there are few who could muster Antony's principled consistency when it comes to human rights, freedom and dignity. As a humble token of appreciation from the advocacy groups and the Palestinian community, it is presented with a sincere 'thank you'.

I would also like to take this opportunity to extend my gratitude to 'Australians for Palestine' for awarding this important prize to Professor Stuart Rees last year – an equally commendable recipient.

It is only right, then, that I take a moment to thank Professor Rees for his unwavering support for the Palestinian people and their rights. It was unfortunate that I was unable to attend this ceremony last year to witness the first of many shining stars receive this prize.

Now, my first exposure to the empathy and intellectualism of *tonight's* shining star was back in 2006 when I read his book, *My Israel Question*. I found it to be particularly significant as it laid out, in a methodical and illuminating way, the tactics and broader strategies of the Israel lobby in Australia. It is only after gaining this familiarity with its modus operandi that past and present efforts to distort, suppress and smear become less obscure and intimidating. And it's this familiarity that helps give us confidence to respond effectively to and even push back against the concerted and sustained anti-Palestine campaigns. You don't need me to tell you just how important this is in the current climate. Following the Trump administration's latest announcement, which is obviously destructive beyond words, I have taken heart from my reflections on the power of reason and clear argument, and how they have been employed by all of us to achieve measurable success. Although I wouldn't go so far as to say that the current Australian government is sympathetic, it has, and only recently, re-affirmed its support for UNRWA, and refused to either soften its commitment to a two-state solution or re-assess its position towards settlements. This is not what the lobby has been after; strong as it is, it hasn't had a satisfying win for a while now.

Reading Antony's book therefore inspired me. It also made me want to meet Antony and ask him more about the Jewish community and the Israel lobby in Australia. His insights were just as rich as those in his book, and the importance of understanding these influential stakeholders when it comes to Australian foreign policy vis-à-vis the Middle East hasn't diminished with time.

Briefly, ladies and gentlemen, I must also mention that this occasion sits between the Palestinian National Day and the UN Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

As most of you would be aware, the core of our independence declaration, which was made on the first National Day in 1988, is the 'Palestinian National Program', which centers around ending the Israeli occupation, bringing about the self-determination of the Palestinian people by

establishing a state on the 1967 borders (with East Jerusalem as its capital), and securing the right of return for the Palestinian refugees.

Also – and significantly – it includes the *guiding principles* for the future Palestinian state, including a commitment to human rights, democratic transition, gender equality, social justice, rule of law, and sustainable human development. This is something that cannot be overstated.

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

Truthfully, it is still a long and mountainous journey to achieve our national rights and enjoy the crisp air of statehood, but I believe that a well-paved road *is* still there, and that it remains open. This award's namesake, the city of peace, joins me in awaiting that day.

Congratulations again to Antony, and I wish him all the best in his future endeavours.

**Thank you.**