

Canadian PM Stephen Harper addresses the Knesset (20 January 2014)

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Thank you very much. Thank you Mr. Speaker, Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition, Chief Justice, Ministers and Members of the Knesset, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. language for use in polite society., thank you for your tremendous hospitality.

Shalom. And thank you for inviting me to visit this remarkable country, and especially for this opportunity to address the Knesset. It is truly a great honour. And if I may, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my wife Laureen and the entire Canadian delegation, let me begin by thanking the government and people of Israel for the warmth of your hospitality. You have made us feel extremely welcome. We have felt immediately at home.

Ladies and gentlemen, Canada and Israel are the greatest of friends, and the most natural of allies. And, with your indulgence, I would like to offer a reflection upon what makes the relationship between Canada and Israel special and important because the relationship between us is very strong. The friendship between us is rooted in history, nourished by shared values, and it is intentionally reinforced at the highest levels of commerce and government as an outward expression of strongly held inner convictions.

There has, for example, been a free trade agreement in place between Canada and Israel for many years an agreement that has already proved its worth. The elimination of tariffs on industrial products, and some foodstuffs, has led to a doubling in the value of trade between our countries. But this only scratches the surface of the economic potential of this relationship and I look forward to soon deepening and broadening our mutual trade and investment goals. As well, our military establishments share information and technology. This has also been to

our mutual benefit. For example, during Canada's mission to Afghanistan, our use of Israeli-built reconnaissance equipment saved the lives of Canadian soldiers.

All such connections are important, and build strong bridges between us. However, to truly understand the special relationship between Israel and Canada, one must look beyond trade and

institutions to the personal ties of friendship and kinship. Jews have been present in Canada for more than 250 years. In generation after generation, by hard work and perseverance, Jewish immigrants, often starting with nothing, have prospered greatly. Today, there are nearly 350,000 Canadians who share with you their heritage and their faith. They are proud Canadians.

But having met literally thousands of members of this community, I can tell you this: They are also immensely proud of what the people of Israel have accomplished here of your courage in war, of your generosity in peace, and of the bloom that the desert has yielded, under your stewardship. Laureen and I share that pride, the pride and the understanding that what has been achieved here has occurred in the shadow of the horrors of the Holocaust; the understanding that it is right to support Israel because, after generations of persecution, the Jewish people deserve their own homeland and deserve to live safely and peacefully in that homeland.

Let me repeat that: Canada supports Israel because it is right to do so. This is a very Canadian trait, to do something for no reason other than it is right even when no immediate reward for, or threat to, ourselves is evident. On many occasions, Canadians have even gone so far as to bleed and die to defend the freedom of others in far-off lands. To be clear, we have also periodically made terrible mistakes as in the refusal of our government in the 1930s to ease the plight of Jewish refugees but, as a country, at the turning points of history, Canada has consistently chosen, often to our great cost, to stand with others who oppose injustice, and to confront the dark forces of the world. It is, thus, a Canadian tradition to stand for what is principled and just, regardless of

whether it is convenient or popular. But, I would argue, support today for the Jewish state of Israel is more than a moral imperative it is also of strategic importance, also a matter of our own, long-term interests.

Ladies and gentlemen, I said a moment ago, that the special friendship between Canada and Israel is rooted in shared values. Indeed, Israel is the only country in the Middle East, which has long anchored itself in the ideals of freedom, democracy and the rule of law. These are not mere notions. They are the things that, over time and against all odds, have proven to be the only ground in which human rights, political stability, and economic prosperity, may flourish. These values are not proprietary; they do not belong to one nation or one people.

Nor are they a finite resource; on the contrary, the wider they are spread, the stronger they grow. Likewise, when they are threatened anywhere, they are threatened everywhere. And what threatens them, or more precisely, what today threatens the societies that embrace such values and the progress they nurture? Those who scorn modernity, who loathe the liberty of others, and who hold the differences of peoples and cultures in contempt. Those who, often begin by hating the Jews, but, history shows us, end up hating anyone who is not them. Those forces, which have threatened the state of Israel every single day of its existence, and which, today, as 9/11 graphically showed us, threaten us all.

And so, either we stand up for our values and our interests, here, in Israel, stand up for the existence of a free, democratic and distinctively Jewish state or the retreat of our values and our interests in the world will begin. Ladies and gentlemen, just as we refuse to retreat from our values, so we must also uphold the duty to advance them. And our commitment as Canadians to what is right, fair and just is a universal one. It applies no less to the Palestinian people, than it does to the people of Israel. Just as we unequivocally support Israel's right of self-defence, so too Canada has long-supported a just and secure future for the Palestinian people. And, I believe, we share with Israel a sincere hope that the Palestinian people and their leaders... will choose a viable,

democratic, Palestinian state, committed to living peacefully alongside the Jewish state of Israel.

As you, Prime Minister [Netanyahu], have said, when Palestinians make peace with Israel, Israel will not be the last country to welcome a Palestinian state as a new member of the United Nations - it will be the first. Sadly, we have yet to reach that point. But, when that day comes, and come it must, I can tell you that Israel may be the first to welcome a sovereign Palestinian state, but Canada will be right behind you. Ladies and gentlemen, support – even firm support – doesn't mean that allies and friends will agree on all issues all of the time. No state is beyond legitimate questioning or criticism. But our support does mean at least three things.

First, Canada finds it deplorable that some in the international community still question the legitimacy of the existence of the State of Israel. Our view on Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state is absolute and non-negotiable.

Second, Canada believes that Israel should be able to exercise its full rights as a UN member- state and to enjoy the full measure of its sovereignty. For this reason, Canada has spoken on numerous occasions in support of Israel's engagement and equal treatment in multilateral fora. And, in this regard, I should mention that we welcome Israel's induction this month into the western, democratic group of states at the United Nations.

Third, we refuse to single out Israel for criticism on the international stage.

Now I understand, in the world of diplomacy, with one, solitary, Jewish state and scores of others, it is all too easy “to go along to get along” and single out Israel. But such “going along to get along,” is not a “balanced” approach, nor a “sophisticated” one; it is, quite simply, weak and wrong. Unfortunately, ladies and gentlemen, we live in a world where that kind of moral relativism runs rampant. And in the garden of such moral relativism, the seeds of much more sinister notions can be

easily planted. And so we have witnessed, in recent years, the mutation of the old disease of anti-Semitism and the emergence of a new strain.

We all know about the old anti-Semitism. It was crude and ignorant, and it led to the horrors of the death camps. Of course, in many dark corners, it is still with us. But, in much of the western

world, the old hatred has been translated into more sophisticated language for use in polite society. People who would never say they hate and blame the Jews for their own failings or the problems of the world, instead declare their hatred of Israel and blame the only Jewish state for the problems of the Middle East. As once Jewish businesses were boycotted, some civil-society leaders today call for a boycott of Israel. On some campuses, intellectualized arguments against Israeli policies thinly mask the underlying realities, such as the shunning of Israeli academics and the harassment of Jewish students. Most disgracefully of all, some openly call Israel an apartheid state.

Think about that. Think about the twisted logic and outright malice behind that: a state, based on freedom, democracy and the rule of law, that was founded so Jews can flourish, as Jews, and seek shelter from the shadow of the worst racist experiment in history, that is condemned, and that condemnation is masked in the language of anti-racism. It is nothing short of sickening.

But this is the face of the new anti-Semitism. It targets the Jewish people by targeting Israel and attempts to make the old bigotry acceptable for a new generation.

Of course, criticism of Israeli government policy is not in and of itself necessarily anti-Semitic. But what else can we call criticism that selectively condemns only the Jewish state and effectively denies its right to defend itself while systematically ignoring – or excusing – the violence and oppression all around it? What else can we call it when, Israel is routinely targeted at the United Nations, and when Israel remains the only country to be the subject of a permanent agenda item at the regular sessions of its Human Rights Council?

Ladies and gentlemen, any assessment – any judgment – of Israel’s actions must start with this understanding: In the sixty-five years that modern Israel has been a nation, Israelis have endured attacks and slanders beyond counting and have never known a day of true peace. And we understand that Israelis live with this, impossible calculus: If you act to defend yourselves, you will suffer widespread condemnation, over and over again. But, should you fail to act, you alone will suffer the consequence of your inaction, and that consequence will be final, your destruction.

The truth, that Canada understands, is that many of the hostile forces Israel faces, are faced by all Western nations. And Israel faces them for many of the same reasons we face them. You just happen to be a lot closer to them. Of course, no nation is perfect. But neither Israel’s existence nor its policies are responsible for the instability in the Middle East today. One must look beyond Israel’s borders to find the causes of the relentless oppression, poverty and violence in much of the region, of the heartbreaking suffering of syrian refugees, of sectarian violence and the fears of religious minorities, especially Christians, and of the current domestic turmoil in so many states.

So what are we to do? Most importantly, we must deal with the world as we find it. The threats in this region are real, deeply rooted, and deadly and the forces of progress, often anemically weak. For too many nations, it is still easier to scapegoat Israel than to emulate your success. It is easier to foster resentment and hatred of Israel’s democracy than it is to provide the same rights and freedoms to their own people. I believe that a Palestinian state will come, and one thing that will make it come is when the regimes that bankroll terrorism realise that the path to peace is accommodation, not violence.

Which brings me to the government of Iran. Late last year, the world announced a new approach to diplomacy with the government in Tehran. Canada has long held the view that every diplomatic measure should be taken to ensure that regime never obtains a nuclear weapon. We therefore appreciate the earnest efforts of the five permanent members of

the Security Council and Germany. Canada will evaluate the success of this approach not on the merits of its words, but on the implementation and verification of its promised actions.

We truly hope that it is possible to walk the Iranian government back from taking the irreversible step of manufacturing nuclear weapons. But, for now, Canada's own sanctions will remain fully in place. And should our hopes not be realized, should the present agreement prove ephemeral Canada will be a strong voice for renewed sanctions.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me conclude with this thought.

Je crois que l'histoire d'Israël est UN très bel exemple pour le monde entier. I believe the story of Israel is a great example to the world.

It is a story, essentially, of a people whose response to suffering has been to move beyond resentment and build a most extraordinary society a vibrant democracy a freedom-loving country... with an independent and rights-affirming judiciary, an innovative, world-leading "start-up" nation. You have taken the collective memory of death and persecution to build an optimistic, forward-looking land one that so values life, you will sometimes release a thousand criminals and terrorists, to save one of your own.

In the democratic family of nations, Israel represents values, which our government takes as articles of faith, and principles to drive our national life. And therefore, through fire and water, Canada will stand with you. My friends, you have been generous with your time and attention. Once more, Laureen and I and our entire delegation thank you for your generous hospitality, and look forward to continuing our visit to your country. Merci beaucoup. Thank you for having us, and may peace be upon Israel.