



New Zealand Friends of Israel Association, Inc.



Honesty Integrity Commitment Vision Justice

This is an address given by Tony Kan, President of NZ Friends of Israel Association Inc given at a reception for the Ambassador of Israel to New Zealand on Sunday, 3 November 2013:

Mr and Mrs Ambassador, Ravit Abrams, Representative of the Hebrew Congregation and Friends, welcome, baruch hava.

First impressions are often those that last the longest.

The first time the Ambassador called me, it went like this.

He said, “Shalom!”

I said “MaNishma!”

He said, “Baruch Hashem!”

I said, “Baruch atah”

He said, “Do you think we should start speaking English?”

I said, “Absolutely, because I’ve run out already.”

And we both had a good laugh together.

As you can see we have been blessed once again that Israel has seen fit to appoint another warm and approachable person to be their representative to New Zealand.

Although we have as a nation had a short history, we have already developed our own traditions.

New Zealanders have always taken an active part in foreign affairs and New Zealanders have a proud tradition of fighting injustice wherever it might be found.

Perhaps it is because we feel we are at the ends of the earth, we can provide some much needed perspective. Perhaps in our youth, we feel anything can be fixed and do not hesitate to attempt it.

New Zealand did not hesitate to send it’s young to support its kin against an aggressive foe in two world wars.

But it wasn’t until World War II that it came face to face with an Evil it had never encountered before.

A State that was bent on Genocide.

In the aftermath of WWII, we too said “Never Again” and joined the world in forming the UN.

Our own Peter Fraser contributed greatly to the drafting of the UN Charter.

The Holocaust made it clear to the World that the Jewish people must have a Home.

A place where they would no longer be driven from pillar to post.

A home where they would no longer be persecuted for being a Jew.

From here stems New Zealand’s long history of supporting Israel.

It was one of the 33 countries that first voted in favour of UN Resolution 181 that established the State of Israel

Violence almost immediately erupted.

Yet Israel has survived.

By the skin of its teeth, it has survived.

More latterly New Zealand has fought against atmospheric testing of nuclear weapons.

And as President of the UN Security Council, led the effort to put the Rwandan genocide on the UN’s agenda

Today, we see another injustice emerging once more.

Anti-Semitism is growing once more.

Reports of anti-semitic violence are becoming more frequent.

Anti-semitic rhetoric, often attempting to rewrite history, is growing more strident.

The old stereotypes of Jews are being promoted.

Alarmingly, in some quarters the lie is believed. Research shows 40% of Europeans over 16 believe that Israel is conducting a war of extermination against Palestinians.

In 1973, the NZ Friends of Israel Association was formed as a reaction against the injustice being dealt to Jews at that time.

The Munich Massacre was still fresh in our minds when the news of the Yom Kippur War reached the shores of New Zealand.

And New Zealanders acted to correct the poor reporting that was going on then.

Almost 40 years on, a new generation has emerged to fight racial prejudice and intolerance toward Jews.

Today, our children do not understand the evil of the Holocaust and bow to Nazi flags.

Today, our leaders such as John Tamihere say that “he is sick and tired of hearing how many Jews were gassed.”

Today, our Government legislates against Kosher Slaughter not realising that when done properly there is no cruelty involved.

Today, many of our well meaning but misguided biblical scholars no longer believe that the land of Israel and the Jewish people continue to have a central role in Hashem’s plans for the world.

Today, a Church, in teaching the book Paul’s Epistle to the Romans from the Pulpit elected to omit Chapters 9-11 because they were deemed too controversial. Yet these are the very chapters where St Paul explains why and how Jewish believers of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob remain relevant to Christians.

To many Christians, Judaism is a harsh callous out-dated religion that advocates the death penalty, is full of judgement, and lacking in grace and compassion. In fact, quite a few Christians believed that grace and compassion are New Testament innovations.

Others believe Judaism embodies the God of Judgement and Christianity, the God of love, compassion and kindness.

I have even heard it said that Christians need not read the Old Testament since all relevant passages have been quoted by the New Testament writers. Today, to be called a Pharisee is to be labelled the worst of hypocrites.

Put together, the prevailing view among Christians, as one learned and influential scholar E P Sanders sadly puts it, “is that Judaism is at best an inadequate religion or at worst one which destroys any hope of a proper relationship between God and Man.”

Despite the fact there has been much modern New Testament scholarship that proves these ideas as being wrong, they are still widely held. A couple of millennia of inertia are difficult to arrest.

The impact of this thinking has been far reaching. For many Christians, Jews have little relevance, their connection to the land of Israel is broken, and consequently they only recognise the Arab connection and side with the Palestinians over the future of Israel and the West Bank.

The broken connection means Christians often misinterpret both Old and New Testament texts because they know little of the Jewish historical and cultural context in which they were written.

In a misguided effort to “help” the Jews, Christians have sought to coerce them into converting to the new religion, without realising that such action contradicts St. Paul’s writings.

Still others believe that only Christians have a place in the world to come. Christians are the true Israel and the true heirs to the Promises of God. Consequently the Israel of God is a spiritual one, that the land and the Kingdom of God are only to be understood in a figurative sense and that any sense of a Geographic Israel has been superseded.

For centuries many Christians have accused Jews of killing Jesus and interpreted any misfortune that has befallen them, including the Holocaust, as a judgment of God.

Christian Antisemitism manifests itself as a kind of religious supremacism, as an age old vendetta founded on a false accusation of murder, as a denial of the connection between Christians, the Jewish People, Israelis, the modern state of Israel and the biblical land of Israel.

With over 90% of our members being Christians, Christian Anti-Semitism is a focus for New Zealand Friends of Israel.

According to the Australia Israel Review, for several years now, the number of anti-semitic acts of violence in Australasia alone have grown by over 30% year on year.

In Sydney, 5 days ago, a family of five adults, aged between 27-66, walking home from Shabbat were attacked and severely beaten because they were Jews.

All the men were wearing kippot. As a result of the attack, various members of the group have suffered concussion, a fractured cheekbone, a broken nose, lacerations, bruising and even bleeding on the brain.

And so, today this Association:

Raises funds to further holocaust education so that a new generation of New Zealand children can learn that racial prejudice and intolerance, bullying and corruption when left unchecked can result in a Holocaust.

Writes submissions protesting our government's decision to support the Palestinian Authorities' quest for "non-member observer state" status at the UN.

Works with the New Zealand Zionist Federation to bring Holocaust Survivors to speak about their experiences in schools.

Promotes inter-faith bible studies so that Christians and Jews may better understand each other's perspectives.

Joins with others in speaking out against unbalanced reporting of Jewish matters

Hosts young Israeli tourists in our homes

Provides a way for New Zealanders to be not just Friends in name only but Friends in deed.

The Association teaches about Jewish history and culture so that ignorance does not create myth, and misinformation does not misguide the gullible.

These enemies, ignorance and prejudice seem so huge and they never seem to tire.

Nevertheless we are undaunted.

By supporting Israel, New Zealand, among many other nations, has helped to create a Jewel in the Middle East.

A nation that shows it is possible for democracy and the rule of law can work even there.

A great source of scientific, technological and cultural innovation that has benefited the world.

A bulwark of regional financial prosperity.

Israel has more than survived, it now thrives.

As New Zealanders we stand proud of our Nation's participation in these efforts.

As New Zealanders we're proud to continue that tradition.

Furthermore, many New Zealanders feel a close connection with Israel for they count the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as their God too.

Mr Ambassador we welcome you to New Zealand and the South Island. Know that despite recessions, earthquakes and rewritten histories, you and your people will always have a friend in New Zealand, a place at our table, a bed in our homes and a focus of our prayers.

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If you would like to find out more about the NZ Friends of Israel Association Inc, then please email info@nzfoi.org.nz or call +64 (27)433 9745: www.nzfoi.org.nz

Closing

Thank you Mr Ambassador.

I know that we look forward to working with you and getting to know you and your family over the next few years. **Can we put our hands together to express our appreciation in the usual way.**

Now, I'd like to introduce to you the committee members of New Zealand Friends of Israel who have all worked hard to make this afternoon a success. I know this is putting you on the spot, but please stand up as I call your name. They are:

Rebecca Marchand Glennis Lane Susette McLachlan John & Alison Clarke

Yoko Allan Penny Ingram

And I'd like to extend a special thanks to **Mariela Arca** for coordinating the event on behalf of the Embassy, to **Susette McLachlan** for her reading, to **Andre Marchand** for playing the piano so ably and to **Catherine Withers** and **Kate Macpherson** for taking the Ambassador's family on a tour of the city. **Can we put our hands together once again to express our appreciation in the usual way. [Clap] You may sit down now.**

Last but not least, we want to thank you for coming to show your support for Israel by taking the time and expense to attend this meeting.

Did you know that there is something known as the Jewish Goodbye? It's when you start your goodbyes and end up walking out the door 30 minutes later.

The amount of time increases exponentially depending on how many Jews there are in the room.

You don't have to be Jew for this to work.

We encourage you to stay, enjoy a cup of tea and coffee with us, and introduce yourself to the Ambassador or a committee member and feel free to ask questions or comment about anything that has been said this afternoon.