

Today, we gather on the lands of the Ngunnawal people, the traditional custodians of these ancient lands. Here, their ancestors walked, lived, and survived for thousands of generations. I acknowledge the inherited responsibility of culture and traditional practices passed down by the elders to future generations, to protect and maintain sacred sites and customs. May we always honour their deep connection to this land and their enduring culture.

Shalom,

Earlier this year, I travelled to Israel, the land of your ancestors, where I saw the Jewish people standing resilient on the soil of your heritage—a land where your forefathers walked thousands of years ago. I believe you when you say you are indigenous to Israel, that the land is woven into the fabric of your ancient history—not as colonisers, as some suggest, but as a people who have risen and flourished since the second millennium BCE, leaving indelible marks across the land, from the remnants of Solomon’s Temple in Jerusalem to the Dead Sea Scrolls in the South.

I see you. I believe you.

I see you, descendants of David, who faced Goliath, a Philistine from Crete. I believe you when you remind the world that, just like David, you, too, face challenges that seem insurmountable, yet you prevail time and time again, standing firm in the land promised to you by HaShem. Though the Romans tried to erase your history by renaming the Kingdom of Israel to Palestine, I see you holding onto the truth of your heritage, just as you held onto it at Masada, resisting Roman occupation. You have never ceded your sovereignty and have reclaimed what is rightfully yours.

I see you. I believe you.

Masada—meaning “strong foundation” in Hebrew—is more than a fortress. It symbolises the ancient kingdom of Israel, the destruction it endured, and

the last stand of Jewish patriots facing the Roman army. Built atop a barren desert plateau, Masada stands as a testament to the Jewish spirit, representing courage, resistance, and dignity. It gave rise to the motto, “Masada shall not fall again,” a declaration that the Jewish people would never allow such tragedy to happen again, especially in the context of national survival.

This spirit of resilience is woven into the identity of the Jewish people.

I see you. I believe you.

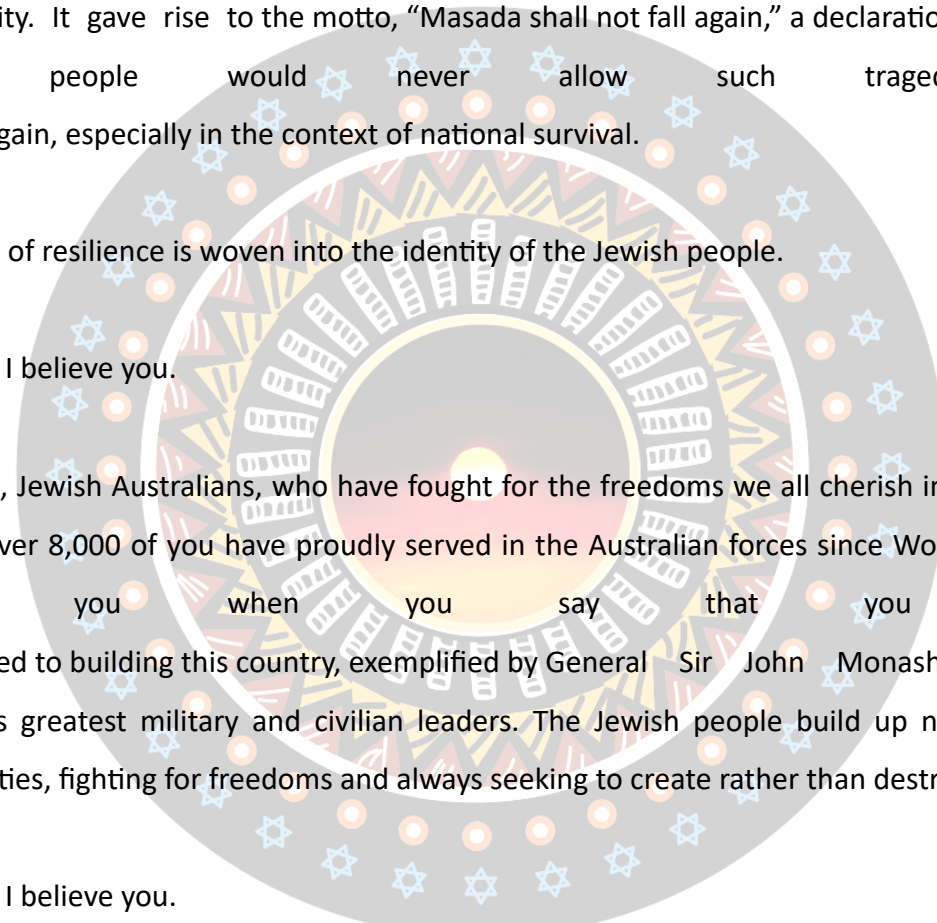
I see you, Jewish Australians, who have fought for the freedoms we all cherish in this great nation. Over 8,000 of you have proudly served in the Australian forces since World War I. I believe you when you say that you have contributed to building this country, exemplified by General Sir John Monash—one of Australia’s greatest military and civilian leaders. The Jewish people build up nations and communities, fighting for freedoms and always seeking to create rather than destroy.

I see you. I believe you.

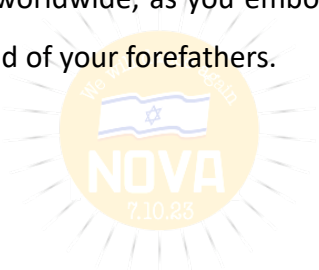
I see you, Jewish people, as the epitome of decolonisation. After a long history of exile and diaspora, you have reclaimed your ancestral lands, revived your language, and proudly showcased your identity, culture, and traditions. Your story, your resilience, serves as an inspiration to indigenous people worldwide, as you embody the right to self-determination and the freedom to live on the land of your forefathers.

I see you. I believe you.

I see you, Jewish people, embodying the values of Tikkun Olam—the call to repair the world. I believe you when you say your mission is to make the world a better place, to contribute to the well-being of all humanity. Through technological innovations, medical breakthroughs, and humanitarian efforts, you demonstrate a dedication to healing the world—not just for your people, but for all.



TIKKUN OLAM  
REPAIRING THE WORLD



I see you. I believe you.

I see you, Children of Israel, just as the Quran acknowledges you, referring to you over 40 times as “Bani Israel.” I believe you, knowing that even in the sacred texts of others, your legacy, history, and truth endure. I cannot remain silent when truth, a core value of Jewish faith, is at risk. As you recite the Sh’ma, you affirm HaShem as truth—a bright light that shines into our sometimes-warped human world.

I see you. I believe you.

I see you, survivors of the Holocaust. I believe you when you declare that “Never again” truly means never again. Your resilience, after enduring unspeakable horrors, serves as a beacon of hope and strength. From the destruction of the Second Temple to the near extinction of your people in the Holocaust, you stand as living proof that even in the face of unimaginable evil, the Jewish people survive, rebuild, and thrive.

I see you. I believe you.

I see you, Jewish people, shaping the very foundation of modern Australia. I believe you when you say you have helped build this nation through advancements in technology and your philanthropic efforts. And as an Aboriginal person, I will never forget the contributions of the late Ron Castan, Jim Spiegelman, and countless other Jewish lawyers who stood with us in the fight for Aboriginal land rights, erasing the notion of Terra Nullius and delivering us justice. Across this continent, many Aboriginal people, like me, remember the Jewish fight for our recognition. We see you. We believe you.

I see you. I believe you.

My connection to this cause is personal. I am from Kakadu, a land rich with ancient stories and wisdom, where my people have also walked, lived, and survived for thousands of generations and I thank Jewish lawyer Jeff Sher QC for his decade long litigation fighting to

have our land returned to us. For me, Kakadu has a similar significance to Masada for the Jewish people – it represents resilience and survival. Kakadu is our strong foundation, a sacred place that we strive to protect and preserve. Kakadu, with its breathtaking landscapes, sacred rock art, and the deep stories of my people, reminds me every day of the responsibility I hold in protecting our heritage and teaching our future generations.

Kakadu and Masada are worlds apart, yet our shared spirit binds us — the spirit of enduring through challenges, of holding onto a culture despite forces that would erase it. In both lands, we are reminded that our culture is alive, our ancestors walk with us, and our stories continue.

Am Yisrael Chai—the people of Israel live, not only in spirit but in reality, standing proudly in your homeland and here in Australia. Your history, your struggle, and your triumphs have shaped both nations. You will continue to shape the

future, contributing to the peace and prosperity of every land you call home.

Who could forget the late federal Labor Minister Barry Cohen?

He was one of your own, a proud Jewish man, a Labor Minister, and a fierce advocate against discrimination. Barry once said he was “obsessive about racism,” and he wore that obsession proudly, fighting passionately for both Aboriginal and Jewish rights. His advocacy extended to Aboriginal health, housing, and rights, and he stood in the face of growing antisemitism within his own party with unwavering conviction.

Barry was a man of deep integrity. He questioned leadership, spoke out against antisemitic silence, and defended Israel passionately, just as he defended Australia’s marginalised. His commitment was clear when he championed Aboriginal causes, from the return of Uluru to the impoverished living conditions, dire health issues, and lack of education access. He spoke against ignorance and demanded accountability. Through his legacy, Barry reminds us all that to stand against prejudice is not only a moral duty but an act of courage that bridges communities.

As a defender of truth, he has set a standard that continues to guide us.

Barry Cohen's commitment was not just about legal and political battles; it was about compassion and understanding. He saw that justice for one group is justice for all, that lifting up Aboriginal people also lifted them. He used his platform to speak out for those whose voices were not heard, for people who, like me, strive to see justice for our communities. Barry's legacy lives on in every Aboriginal person who walks on their own land with pride and a sense of belonging. In his work, we see the values of tikkun olam, of repairing the world, that bind our communities together.

I see you. I believe you.

Am Yisrael Chai. Israel stands as a light unto the nations, extending aid, relief, and innovation to countless countries, improving lives beyond its borders. Today, as always, you continue to stand tall, unbroken and unbowed—a testament to the strength of a people who have faced every Goliath and emerged victorious. You seek to repair and improve the world. You pursue peace. You represent hope.

They say, only in the darkness do we see the stars. Your Magen David is an enduring symbol for a reason. It is the heart of who you are.

I see you. I believe you. And more importantly... I believe in you.

May the Source of strength, who blessed the ones before us, help us find the courage to make our lives a blessing. And let us say, Amen.

Toda Raba. Am Yisrael Chai.

By **NOVA PERIS OAM OLY**

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Ngunnawal Country

UPJ Biennial Shabbat Dinner

<https://novaperisfoundation.org.au>

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