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Happy Birthday To The State Of Israel

ISRAEL'S INDEPENDENCE

Seventy-nine years ago, Hitler's war against the Jews was no longer raging. The Holocaust had finally been checked. The crematoria of Auschwitz-Birkenau and Hitler's other extermination centres had all been snuffed out. However, the furnaces were still smouldering in the hearts of the survivors and the acrid smoke of extermination clung to the soul of a nation; a stench that no laundromat would be able to remove. With two-thirds of European Jewry annihilated the question on the minds of many was — "what about the survivors?" The answer would come on 14th May 1948 when just three years after the fires of extermination had been extinguished, a nation would arise from its ashes—the State of Israel. The State of Israel and Jewish people around the world have just commemorated their annual Yom HaShoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day, when respect is paid to the victims.

When the flag of Israel was raised among the nations on that historic 14 May there were around 700,000 Jews living in the new state. The Nazi genocide in Europe had claimed six million of the House of Israel. It left hundreds of thousands of Jewish displaced persons—survivors with barely a family member left and no longer a place to call "home". The State of Israel would offer hope and a sanctuary to those who had been decimated.

Hostile nations in the Middle East, some of whom had supported Hitler's intentions against the Jews were unwelcoming to this restored Jewish statehood. Because of renewed violence and threats against Jews living in those Arab nations and because of the Jewish refugees in Europe whose hopes were pinned on their ancient homeland, the nascent State of Israel was about to experience a growth spurt.

Within Israel's declaration of Independence was a promise to every Jew in the world who may face persecution, "The State of Israel will be open for Jewish immigration and for the ingathering of the exiles". It contained a clause to let the Arab citizens of Israel know that they would be treated fairly, "It will foster the development of the country for the benefit of all...it will guarantee complete equality of social and political rights to all of its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex". Such declarations, uttered by David Ben-Gurion the first Premier helped shape Israel into the bastion of freedom and democracy it is today—democratic values that all her critical Arab and Islamic neighbours must still match.

INTERNATIONAL HOSTILITY

But the new nation was going to be forged in the furnace of affliction as the surrounding nations would mobilise their armies to put a stop to what the U.N. had agreed should happen in its resolution of 29 November 1947 (UNGA Res. 181). This was Israel's first test. Could she survive an onslaught by the regular armies of half a dozen nations when she was desperately looking for weapons to defend herself, let alone trained people to use them? If the birth of the State so soon after the massacre in Europe was a miracle, then a second miracle also occurred—a tiny nation still learning how to defend itself managed to stay the hand of a coalition of angry nations who sent their regular armies to destroy it. Six thousand Israelis would pay with their lives in this War of Independence—the first of many defensive wars. The Jewish people had decided that when faced with the odds it was better to lose six thousand fighting for a nation that wanted them than to lose six million in nations where they were not welcome. Up until this point they had been the victims of vicious circumstances and despots. From now on they would become the victors no matter what the odds. They only had two choices—to either win or die.

By the end of 1951, just three and a half years into statehood, the Jewish population of Israel doubled. Many of the Jewish survivors from Europe and the Jewish outcasts from the Middle East found a new hope, a hot meal, a warm bed, open arms, and a "Shalom" in the land of their forefathers. As they disembarked at the seaports and airports of Israel it was to the tune of their national anthem, "Our hope has not been exterminated—our two-thousand-year-old hope to be a free people in our land—the land of Zion and Jerusalem".

Israel's victory in June 1967 was another defensive victory. Israel once again was forced to fight to defend itself against threats of annihilation by Arab leaders who backed up their threats by mobilising their armies and



converging upon the borders of Israel. Six years later in the Yom Kippur War of October 1973, a combined and well-organised attack on Israel's southern and northern fronts by Egypt and Syria, fully backed by the might of the Soviet Union, resulted in the equivalent of all the forces of NATO in Europe attacking Israel at the same time. It was the holiest day of the year for the Jewish State—the day when many in the nation fast. The attack came at 2:00 PM on October 6 as many were in their synagogues praying. The citizens of Israel desperately replaced their religious shawls for battle kits as the greatest artillery bombardments since the Second World War were taking place on both of Israel's fronts. As Israel reeled under the onslaught in the first few days, Golda Meir the Prime Minister summed up the resolve of a battle-weary nation when she addressed the world's media: "...the spirit of our men on the front, the spirit of our people in every every village, is a spirit of a who hates war, but knows that in order to live, it must win the war that has been forced upon it". Israel finally prevailed in this war too.

THE HOPE FOR PEACE

The result of Israel's determination to strongly defend herself is what forced Egypt to the negotiating table in 1977. Israel and Egypt have been at peace for 45 years. The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan followed with its own peace treaty in 1994. Others are slowly coming around, but others still strive for Israel's destruction—Iran most vehemently. The Israeli military is indeed a defensive fighting force, but to be credible to those who seek to destroy her she must be a convincingly formidable force. Israel seeks peace with her neighbours, but she is ready to defend herself at any time.

The current painful war in Gaza is another episode in Israel's history for survival. She is left with no other alternative than to eliminate the terrorist threat from Gaza while trying to extricate her captive hostages. What an unenviable task. Hamas has promised to repeatedly carry out October 7 while seeking the destruction of the State of Israel. The distortion of facts and misinformation put out by Israel's detractors and swallowed so gullibly by some media have made Israel look like the bad guy—this is untrue. Israel does not deliberately target innocent civilians. She fights for the freedom of those in captivity while doing the rest of us a favour by ridding the earth of a venomous rattlesnake that refuses to be tamed by the most skilful of charmers. Once the Palestinians acknowledge the right of the Jews to live in the historical land of Israel, and once they lay down their arms, there will be opportunity for a fair negotiated peace agreement.

Perhaps Israel's best defence in answer to its critics are the testimonies of Arabs who are very happy with the State of Israel. One Arab journalist in Israel said, "If I were given the choice, I would rather live in Israel as a second-class citizen than as a first-class citizen in Cairo, Gaza, Amman or Ramallah." Ishmael Khaldi, a high-ranking Muslim Arab in the Israeli Foreign Service said, "By any yardstick you choose...Israel's minorities fare far better than any other country in the Middle East". An Israeli Arab woman whose son sparked controversy when he spoke out in defence of Israel said regarding the accusation that Israel is an apartheid state, "Apartheid! That would mean separate buses for Jews and Arabs. Does such a thing exist here? Or segregated coffee shops. Does that exist here? These accusations need to stop. We coexist excellently. Together we will go through fire and water, Arabs and Jews. I reject everything that they say about Israel because I live here and I know what I am talking about. And I say this as an Arab woman, a Muslim, and a proud Israeli." Israel's critics should sort out their own failings before hypocritically pointing the finger. Western nations like New Zealand need to be supporting the Jewish State in its efforts to preserve democracy in the Middle East. We need to preserve Western civilisation as we know it against barbarism and another dark age.

While the need to defend itself has empowered Israel to say to her enemies "Never again", necessity has also made the Israelis the innovators of some of the world's greatest inventions. From the nation with little water reserves has come drip irrigation and desalination plants—turning salt water into drinking water. Believe it or not they can now make water out of thin air. Other Israeli inventions the world benefits from are the Waze navigation app; the cherry tomato; the electric car grid; the Disk-on-Key; Mobile-Eye, and Intel Israel which has its microprocessors in many of our computers—just to mention a few. Often the negative press around the conflict overrides the accomplishments made by the Jewish State. Despite the challenges she faces Israel will continue to innovate and invent and increase disproportionately the blessing she is to the rest of us—thank you Israel!

Israel needs to make no apologies for its ability to survive—not to the U.N., nor to the Arab League, nor to the 57 nations in the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation which holds great sway in the U.N. and results in resolutions against Israel. It is incumbent upon all civilised nations not only to applaud the one Jewish state in the world for its ability to survive but also for being the one bastion of freedom and democracy in the Middle East with innovations that advance us all. Let us not forget the elephant in the room – the Holy Bible. Thank you Israel, for your prophets and holy scriptures which have become the hope of many. And within those sacred scriptures let Israel find hope in what the prophet Amos said - "I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them," says the LORD your God. (Amos 9:15 NIV).

Despite opposition, hostility, unfair criticism, relentless attempts to discredit her, and the continuing challenge for this ancient people living in its ancient land having to justify its right to exist, there are just three words we will add to the popular Hebrew refrain "Am Yisrael Chai—The People of Israel Live!" Those three words - "ISRAEL—LIVE ON!"

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