

Political

update: Israel celebrates 60 years of independence, 8 May

Key points:

- **Israel celebrates Independence Day with ceremonies across the country**
- **Brown praises Israel's achievements at a celebration with the UK's Jewish community**
- **Ahead of the anniversary, high level meetings were held in London to encourage progress on the Israeli-Palestinian peace process**

Israel celebrates 60 years of independence

- Prime Minister Gordon Brown marked the occasion of Israel's 60th anniversary at a ceremony at Finchley Synagogue yesterday evening (7 May). In his speech he called the creation of Israel one of the "greatest achievements" of the 20th century and honoured Israel's "remarkable achievements...great sufferings and...strong ideals" saying that he has "been and remain(s) a lifelong friend and supporter of Israel".
- He spoke of the "immense threats" that Israel has faced since its creation and stressed that the UK government would support the peace process in order to help Israel and its neighbors overcome these dangers and live in peace as part of the same "extended family". He said:

"Let us all stand ready to help Israel find a truly secure place in a peaceful Middle East. Let us celebrate a nation that can triumph over attempts at isolation, threats of war, and threats of terrorism and emerge even stronger, tending its young caring for its sick, cherishing its old...Let us celebrate a country that even people, thousands of miles away in the remotest corners of the world, think of as home. And it is this that gives me faith in the future."
(07/05/08)

- Celebrations to mark Israeli Independence Day began in Israel yesterday evening (7 May) with an official ceremony at Mount Herzl in Jerusalem. The speaker of the Israeli Knesset, Dalia Itzik, gave a speech in which she praised Israel's achievements over the last six decades and called for peace with Israel's neighbours.
- The festivities continue today and include showcases by the IDF, displays by the Israel Navy and skydiving exhibitions by the Israeli Air Force. Thousands gathered in Rabin Square in Tel Aviv and other cities across Israel to celebrate. Israelis are also flocking to nature reserves and museums which are today open to the public for free in celebration of the occasion.
- Ahead of the day's festivities, Israeli police raised their alert to the second-highest level, amid warnings that militants might try to mar the festivities with a major attack. Thousands of police, including special units, secured the events.

EDM - Israel's 60th Anniversary

- Parliament recognised Israel's 60th anniversary, with a cross-party EDM sponsored by Andrew Dismore MP together with Andrew Gwynne MP and Anne Snelgrove MP:

EDM 1508

That this House recognises the 60th anniversary of Israel's independence; congratulates the state on reaching this important milestone and looks forward to many more anniversaries in the years to come; acknowledges that Israel is a vibrant democracy founded on the principles of liberty, justice and freedom; applauds Israel's internationally recognised achievements, including great advancements in research and development, medical science, as well as its pioneering innovation in agricultural technology, alternative energies and contributions to academia and the arts; recognises Israel's economic resourcefulness and the cultural creativity of its diverse population; respects the strong bilateral relationship and cooperation Israel enjoys with the UK; and is full of hope that despite the many political challenges that lie ahead Israel will find peace with its neighbours so that all in the region can look forward to a future of security and prosperity.

(To support this EDM and thereby show solidarity with Israel at this important time please call the Table Office asking to add your name, citing the EDM number 1508.)

London Meetings

- Gordon Brown's reassertion yesterday (7 May) of the UK's commitment to the peace process came after London hosted two days of high level talks on the political and economic aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process last week on Thursday and Friday (1-2 May).

Private Investors Conference

- The first meeting was a private investor conference held on Thursday 1 May which was attended by over 200 guests and hosted by Secretary of State for International Development, Rt Hon Douglas Alexander MP.
- The event was focused on promoting economic development in the Palestinian Territories by raising the profile and credibility of the Palestine Investment Conference to be held in Bethlehem on 21-23 May.
- The meeting was attended by both Prime Minister Gordon Brown and Quartet Special Envoy Tony Blair. Blair and Brown both encouraged businessmen to attend the investment conference in Bethlehem later this month. Tony Blair also said the Israeli government is making a good faith effort to make it easy for people to attend that meeting.

Meeting of the Quartet

- On Friday 2 May the Quartet (Britain, US, EU, Russia and the UN) met to discuss what more Quartet members can do to encourage progress on the peace process.
- Following the meeting, the Quartet issued a statement expressing its strong support for the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. The Quartet condemned continuing rocket attacks fired from Gaza, called on Israel to end settlement activity and for Palestinians to "tackle terrorism".

Ad Hoc Liaison Committee Meeting

- The Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Palestinian Authority (AHLC) also met in London on Friday (2 May) and was attended by Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad and Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, as well as representatives of the major donor states and international organisations.
- The meeting focused on how to distribute the \$7.7 billion that was pledged at the international donor conference in Paris in December 2007.
- Prime Minister Gordon Brown opened the event, which was co-hosted by Norway and the UK in advance of the Bethlehem donor conference (21-23 May). In his opening address he said that there are “real economic opportunities” in the Middle East and a chance to build “peace and prosperity” across the region. He said:

“My message is very clear: there is an economic prize before us. There is a double dividend for you as companies and the Palestinian people. There is a real chance to build on the ingenuity, skills and the commitment of Palestinians to build peace and prosperity across the region.” (02/05/08)