



APAN
Australia Palestine
Advocacy Network

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The Rt. Hon. The Prime Minister,
Parliament House
Canberra
ACT 2600

3 November 2017

My Dear Prime Minister,

It was very appropriate for you to be present in Beersheba to commemorate a significant moment in Australia's history, but the manner in which the commemoration unfolded, and received your obvious imprimatur is deeply troubling.

You attended a ceremony that exploited the sacrifice of Australian diggers, ignored the facts of history, and insulted the contemporary Palestinian community by leaving them out. The Israeli flag should not have been carried in the charge, or at the least if it was, the Palestinian flag should also have been carried.

I assume you must be acquainted with the history? Beersheba and the eventual routing of the Ottomans would not have been possible without the Arab uprising and the promise of eventual Arab autonomy that gained Arab support

The Ottoman defeat released the Arab community, and in the case of Beersheba, the Palestinian community (Jews Christians and Muslims), to enjoy the hope of that autonomy.

The battle had nothing to do with the later establishment of Israel. The Balfour Declaration of November 1917 which indicates Britain would view with favour the establishment of a Jewish homeland says: "on the understanding that the civil and religious rights of the non-Jewish community are respected". They were not, and have not, and the commemoration you attended was a provocative poke in the eye.

The symbolism of the Beersheba commemoration said: "this land, all of it, is the land of Israel, there is no such entity as a Palestinian people, they have no rights, nor will they ever have rights".

My understanding of Australian values is that we stand for what is fair and just, indeed that we will fight alongside those who are oppressed. Saying never again to the holocaust is absolutely right, but why at the expense of the Palestinians? If you do not understand the current suffering and oppression of the Palestinian people, you have clearly chosen not to; presumably because it is an inconvenient truth within Australian domestic politics and particularly within your own electorate.

Is it too much to ask that on your return you will affirm that your support for Palestine and Palestinian rights is as unshakeable as your support is for Israel and Israeli rights? If you are not able to say this please do not

tell me that you support a 'two-state' solution, because in practice you clearly do not. Without an unequivocal statement in support of Palestinians and Palestine and a willingness to criticise Israel in its flagrant denial of those rights, Australia's position is one of standing with the oppressor against the oppressed. What we walk past is the standard we accept. That is not the Australia I know, or its leadership I can recognise.

Yours sincerely

Bishop George Browning PhD DLitt

President

Australia Palestine Advocacy Network