We are here to celebrate the first meeting of the Australia Israel Leadership Forum in Melbourne.

Melbourne is a great city, one of the world’s most successful multicultural cities, where people of all faiths and none enjoy peaceful and harmonious relations.

And Melbourne has been made an even greater city by the presence of its Jewish community, who are so often at the forefront of business, the law, civic leadership, educational advancement and social progress.

It’s no accident that this city is home to Albert Dadon, his wife Debbie and her amazing family, the Besen family.

Albert and Debbie, I pay tribute to you for your leadership of and your support for this Forum.

And I acknowledge your foresight for recognising that our countries are united not just by politics but by science, the arts and education. All act as the agents of friendship, of mutual understanding and of social justice.

I also thank you and the Besen family for hosting the Forum yesterday at TarraWarra, which is an embodiment of the passions that make Melbourne. Good wine, great food, a love of art and an appreciation of natural beauty.

It is an honour to be able to welcome our overseas visitors to my home city.

And it is a particular honour to be able to welcome Mr Silvan Shalom, Senior Vice Prime Minister of Israel.

Friends, it has been a very full day in what is a very full Forum.
The conversation is ranging from security and counter terrorism to the challenges of energy and climate change, education and early childhood development, Indigenous health and economic development.

We have once again proven that, whatever else may mark out our nations as distinctive in the world, we share a talent for talking.

An eventful year

And friends, this remarkable year has given us much to talk about.

We have lived through a year which began with the world in the grip of financial crisis of almost unprecedented scope and depth.

The costs of the global economic recession are being borne through unemployment, lost trade business collapse and hardship in many countries.

In the US, unemployment remains at 10 per cent, despite encouraging signs last month.

This figure is a stark reminder of how far we are yet to go in overcoming this crisis, of the importance of not relaxing our vigilance.

But the lessons of the economic crisis, or at least the lessons from Australia’s response to it, are also encouraging.

They show that when the leading nations of the world act together with common purpose, they can make a difference.

They show that there is solidarity with the plight of those whose futures are most threatened by these global risks.

And that small nations can have an impact out of proportion to their size – as Australia did through the G-20 processes.

They show that even the most daunting threats can be reduced by determined action.

**Peace and security in the Middle East**

This was also a year that began with a difficult and deadly conflict in Gaza. I remember those days, when I was Acting Prime Minister, all too well.

Those days underscore the difficulty of achieving peace and security in our time.

And they offer a reminder that all those who strive to achieve peace and security should be encouraged and supported.

As I said during those days, and I say again tonight, Australia supports Israel’s right to self defence and its right to self determination.
We understand that it is hard to feel confident in a peaceful future when your people are coming under daily rocket attack.

We acknowledge that there are nations and forces in your region that are committed to Israel’s destruction.

Australia’s Government was a champion for the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. Our commitment to Israel’s security has not wavered since that time.

It’s why we opposed the referral of the Goldstone Report to the UN General Assembly.

It’s why we continue to urge the Iranian Government to engage with the international community on the issue of its nuclear program.

It’s why we are ready to support sanctions against Iran if it does not comply with the obligations placed on it by the international community.

And it’s why we continue to support a two state solution in the Middle East, with both Israelis and Palestinians able to live in peace and security within defined borders.

Friends, support for Israel remains strong and bi-partisan in Australia and it will stay that way.

**Facing long term challenges**

Our goals of peace and security must be achieved amid changing times.

As the last Forum made so clear to us, peace and security depend on prosperity and development. They depend on environmental sustainability and access to water. They depend on education and civil society, on democracy and tolerance, as much as they depend on the essential activities of diplomacy and defence.

Friends, in this new century the world is coming to terms with its interdependence.

Our financial systems bind us together.

The movement of our peoples and the growth of their diasporas bind us together.

The reality of climate change and its impact on our nations bind us together.

Friends, these changing realities create common responsibilities.

Our economies and our people thrive amid openness.

As the world has battled the threat of economic recession, it battled the prospect of nations turning in on themselves, of a retreat from openness and a loss of confidence in the future.

But the world is winning that battle and nations are choosing to act together rather than turn inward.
That same spirit needs to be harnessed in this momentous year for international action on climate change.

In Australia, climate change remains an issue of great controversy, as anybody going near a TV screen or a newspaper in recent weeks will have noticed. It is an issue which topples party leaders and ignites great passions.

Recent events in Australia point to a new future for democratic politics where environmental issues stand alongside older ones based on economic scarcity and cultural difference.

But with passion must come reason. While we extend debate to all views, our policies must be based on scientific consensus and our actions should be based on reason.

Australia and Israel may have relatively small populations. We may be directly responsible for only a fraction of the world’s greenhouse gas emissions. But as two of the hottest and driest countries on the planet, it is in our interests to get all of the nations of the world acting together. In our usual fashion, we can cast a giant shadow by showing courage, common sense and leadership.

Our commitment to cuts in carbon emissions of between 5 and 25 per cent by 2020 is based on that desire to promote global action.

As the Prime Minister made clear on the Thursday, Australia’s commitment to national action and to sharing responsibility for international solutions remains as strong as ever.

**Progress through collaboration**

And that is just one reason why the furthering of friendship through the Forum and exchange is so important.

Taking that action, learning how to prosper in a low pollution economy, speeding the transitions that we know we must make, is a task that can only be helped by the ties we are deepening here tonight.

As I said in Jerusalem, the Australia-Israel Leadership Forum is a special kind of conversation.

It is a conversation between friends. It is a conversation across parties and across sectors.

It is a conversation that will contain intense and passionate differences, but where all participants respect the value of the exchange and the shared values that make it possible.

Around that core of passionate argument flow many other kinds of exchange.

Exchange based not just on words, but on actions.

Whether it is water solutions for more arid landscapes.

Renewable energy solutions for a low carbon economy.
Innovative new transport and infrastructure solutions.

Or education reforms to give our people the skills to act as problem-solvers in this new world.

We know that in the years ahead the nations and societies that adapt most successfully to these conditions will be those that innovate and learn fastest.

Our Forum today has shown once again why this matters and where we can learn from each other.

**Vibrant Democracies**

It has also focused on the serious and difficult questions of terrorism, of democracy and of human rights.

In both our regions, for both our nations, the threat of terrorism is always present.

We know from human experience the pain and trauma that such violent action causes.

We know that the first commitment of a Government must be to keep its people secure.

So it is in our shared interest to make sure that our surveillance, our analysis and our counter-terrorism methods keep several steps ahead of the terrorist threat.

As we discussed today, in fulfilling that obligation, we also maintain our respect for human rights and for the rule of law.

I do not accept a false polarization of the debate between those who care about security and those who advocate respect for human rights.

Our commitment to democratic and human rights is woven into our sense of nationhood, as is our commitment to defence.

In this Forum and in our actions, we must strive to reach those goals together.

**Conclusion**

Friends, our Forum is being held as an amazing year concludes.

In the debates that will define our shared future, there are rightly many contending views.

When the outlook is uncertain and dangerous, it may be tempting to stick like glue to the positions that many have put their lives into building. But openness, including being open to changing perspectives, is not the enemy of deeply held values. Openness is a sign of confidence.

The threats to Israel and Australia are real. But so is our membership of a wider international community. As small nations, our place in that community is determined by our skill in building relationships as well as our actions at home.
The task for us, for every generation, is to narrow the gap between rhetoric and reality in relation to the most important issues of our time. We have agreed today that our friendship is a special one - that gives us an opportunity to deepen it through action.

As a leadership forum, the task of this group is to reflect and shape the change that is going on across our societies. It is clear that, whatever our perspective, we should recognise the challenge of deepening our democratic legitimacy, so that when the hard decisions come, in whatever form, we are in a position to take them with the trust and the participation of our people.

Like all nations we have an over-riding responsibility – which is to further the ability of our citizens to thrive in the modern world.

That requires providing opportunity as well as security.

It is the task of all citizens in a democratic society.

To strive as hard as they can in whatever field they choose, and to build bridges between peoples through exchange and discussion.

This Forum is a great example of that process at work.

We will never have all the solutions at our fingertips, but we can refresh our democracies to tap more of the energy and passion displayed by the citizens of both our nations.

With these values we can hold our heads high in the world and approach the future with the humility and the optimism that it deserves.

Thank you

Media Contact:

media@deewr.gov.au

Non-media queries: 1300 363 079