



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**Federation Chamber**

**ADJOURNMENT**

**Middle East**

**SPEECH**

**Thursday, 14 May 2015**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

**Date** Thursday, 14 May 2015  
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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Hayes, Chris, MP

**Source** House  
**Proof** No  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Mr HAYES** (Fowler—Chief Opposition Whip) (12:48): Growing up in a religious household and having a faith-based education probably in part accounts for my social conservatism. My upbringing has also caused me to know from a very young age that the Jews have historically been a much-persecuted people. Therefore, I find it easy to accept the right of a Jewish state to exist and I believe the people of Israel are entitled to live in peace and to protect their way of life. However, I have become increasingly concerned about the hostilities in Israel's occupied territories, as well as the lack of progress in finding a path towards the creation of a Palestinian state, as Palestinians too have a right to exist and enjoy statehood.

Last year's Gaza War has had a profound impact on me—a conflict which saw Israel attempt to suppress Hamas rockets but resulted in the deaths of over 1,500 Palestinians, of whom 538 were children. Gaza was decimated, with critical infrastructure destroyed, along with the housing of more than 100,000 Palestinians. I still find it hard to shake the image of the four boys playing on the beach in Gaza cut down. While I have serious misgivings about the scale of the Israeli response, I am equally disturbed by the fact that civilian sites were used by Hamas to shield militia, and I deplore the fact that over 3,000 rockets were fired by Hamas, threatening the lives of Israeli citizens. Nevertheless, no fair-minded person could possibly think what occurred in Gaza was acceptable.

With a view to lasting peace in the region and recognising the dignity of people, the international community has long held the view of a two-state solution that recognises the sovereignty of both Israel and Palestine. Indeed, Benjamin Netanyahu, when he came to office in 2009, spoke of his determination to see 'two peoples living with amity and mutual respect' and he indicated that Israel would be willing to support a two-state solution in a future peace agreement. However, recent comments and the behaviour of Mr Netanyahu and members of his government have cast serious doubt as to his sincerity in achieving this outcome. Distancing himself from a two-state outcome gives great cause for concern. The international community should be demanding an unequivocal commitment from him to a Palestinian state and the reinvigoration of the peace process. Since he came to office in 2009, more than 10,000 homes have been built in the occupied territories. The issue of settlement activity remains one that continues to frustrate the peace process. Regardless of the prospects of future land swaps, the construction of settlements must cease.

There is no doubt a two-state solution is in the best interests of Israel itself. The consequences of trying to absorb the territories would lead either to an end of Israel's democracy if the Palestinians were denied a vote or the end of Israel as a predominantly Jewish state and a haven for Jews escaping persecution. Australia, along with the majority of the international community, could never accept a situation where sections of the population were denied fundamental democratic rights. During his visit to the Holy Land in 2009, Pope Benedict said 'Israel has the right to exist and enjoy peace and security'. He went on to say that the 'Palestinian people have the right to a sovereign, independent homeland, to live with dignity'.

Given Prime Minister Netanyahu's recent behaviour, along with that of senior members of his Likud Party, to distance themselves from a two-state solution, I believe it falls to countries like Australia, who believe in the dignity of all peoples of the region, to become more engaged in the peace process and to address the need for tangible progress in the creation of a Palestinian state, while ensuring respect and security for the Jewish homeland. I conclude with the words that were also offered by Pope Benedict: 'Let the two-state solution become a reality, not remain a dream.'