



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**Federation Chamber**

**STATEMENTS ON INDULGENCE**

**Sharon, Mr Ariel**

**SPEECH**

**Wednesday, 12 February 2014**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

**Date** Wednesday, 12 February 2014  
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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Fletcher, Paul, MP

**Source** House  
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**Mr FLETCHER** (Bradfield—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Communications) (12:12): If you visit Israel—as I have been fortunate enough to do on three occasions, most recently in 2012—you cannot but be struck by the small size of the country, by the challenge involved in defending that tiny land and by the extraordinary history of the modern nation of Israel, founded shortly after World War II. When you visit Yad Vashem, the Holocaust memorial, you gain some tiny measure of understanding of the urgency with which the founding generation of Israelis fought to establish the modern state of Israel. When you learn of the feats of the ragtag band of citizen fighters, some of them exhausted survivors of the horrors of the Holocaust in Europe, in defending their new nation in the face of active hostility from many nations around them in the war of independence and in the face of what might be called studied indifference from many in the West, who might have been expected to come to their assistance, you cannot but be astounded.

Ariel Sharon was one of the founding generation of the modern state of Israel. We know him now, of course, on the basis of his extraordinary career and achievements and presence throughout Israeli politics over many, many years. We know him as an Israeli general of the first rank, a former commander in the Israeli army, a former Israeli Minister of Defense and somebody with a very distinguished political career who was Prime Minister of Israel on several occasions. Of course, he was a man who did a number of unexpected and surprising things in his career. In 2004 and 2005 he orchestrated Israel's unilateral disengagement from the Gaza Strip. Facing stiff opposition to this policy within his own party, the Likud, in November 2005 he left Likud to form a new party, Kadima.

The title that Ariel Sharon choose for his biography, *Warrior*, perhaps captures one of the most well-known facets of this complex man, but his appreciation of the strategic challenges and the moral obligations facing the modern Israel was more complex and nuanced. I will quote the remarks of former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, who had this to say:

He had the toughness of mind to despise all illusions about the threats facing Israel.

But he had the imagination to know that genuine peace, if attainable with honour and dignity both for Arabs and Israelis, is the anchor ultimately for Israel's security.

The success and the presence of the modern state of Israel, achieved in the face of repeated military attacks and almost never-ending terrorist threats over a period of nearly 70 years, is quite an extraordinary achievement. Israel today is a vigorous, successful, multiparty democracy. Amongst other things, it is a high-tech superpower with a presence in the fields of communications, radio-communications, satellite and many other high-tech industries, as well as in water use, desert agriculture and many other industries. Israel and its people have established a remarkable track record of success and achievement and a contribution to the world's technology which is quite extraordinary for a country with a population which is only just under eight million.

The success of the state of Israel is tied up very much with the life of Ariel Sharon. He was one of the founding figures of that nation. He was a lion of Israeli politics. He was a man very much to be admired. I join with many other parliamentarians in expressing my condolences to the people of Israel at the loss of a great leader of their nation.