



B'NAI B'RITH WORLD CENTER - JERUSALEM

In a riveting, driving defense of the State of Israel, Harper delivered what was arguably the most unequivocally supportive speech ever made by a Foreign dignitary in Israel's parliament.

Speaking movingly of Israel and Canada as "the greatest of friends and the most natural of allies", he said "Canada supports Israel because it is right to do so...support today for the Jewish state of Israel is more than a moral imperative, it is also of strategic importance, also a matter of our own long-term interests...Either we stand up for our values and our interest, here, in Israel, stand up for the existence of a free, democratic and distinctively Jewish state, or the retreat of our values and our interests in the world will begin...Canada finds it deplorable that some in the international community still question the legitimacy of the existence of the State of Israel. Our view on Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state is absolute and non-negotiable...We refuse to single out Israel for criticism on the international stage."

Harper ended his speech with the following: "I believe the story of Israel is a great example in the world. It is a story, essentially, of a people whose response to suffering has been to move beyond resentment and build a most extraordinary society, a vibrant democracy, a freedom-loving country with an independent and rights-affirming judiciary, an innovative, world-leading 'start-up' nation. You have taken the collective memory of death and persecution to build an optimistic, forward-looking land, one that so values life you will sometimes release a thousand criminals and terrorists to save one of your own. In the democratic family of nations, Israel represents values, which our government takes as articles of faith, and principles to drive our national life. And therefore, through fire and water, Canada will stand with you."

The address was interrupted by much applause and many standing ovations – and by two Arab MKs who demonstratively walked out of the chamber after hecking all four of the speakers.

Schneider also attended a Romanian embassy reception for visiting President Traian Basescu held at the Peres Center for Peace in Jaffa on Tuesday. During his visit – his second during his term of office which is coming to an end – Basescu said that “we feel Israel and Romania are family. We are developing our partnership with Israel in different areas, step by step. This is a strategic partnership between the countries.”

The purpose of Basescu's visit was to strengthen bilateral ties between Israel and Romania, which marked 65 consecutive years of diplomatic relations last June – the only eastern European country with such an unbroken record.

Romania is one of the few countries that hold government- to-government meetings with Israel in which ministers sign cooperation agreements.

On Monday, Basescu told Israel Shimon Peres that both Israel and the Palestinians must jump on the chance for peace.

Basescu expressed his support for a Palestinian state, but emphasized that any solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must include a secure Israel.