

2024 MP Delegation – Israel and Dubai

Submitted by:

The Hon. David Davis MP

Member for Southern Metropolitan Region

Shadow Minister for Energy, Affordability and Security

Shadow Minister for the SEC

Shadow Minister for the Arts and Creative Industries

Introduction

This report covers the travel of a delegation of Victorian Liberal MPs to Israel and Dubai.

Travel occurred between 31 May and 12 June 2024.

The delegation members were:

- The Hon. David Davis MP, Member for Southern Metropolitan Region
- James Newbury MP, Member for Brighton
- David Southwick MP, Member for Caulfield
- Chris Crewther MP, Member for Mornington
- Trung Luu MLC, Member for Western Metropolitan Region
- Renee Heath MLC, Member for Eastern Victoria

The purpose of travel was electorate business. Travel was undertaken in my capacity as the Member for Southern Metropolitan Region owing to the close relationship with the Southern Metropolitan Region’s Jewish community with Israel and resulting social cohesion and antisemitism challenges.

Date	Country	Location	Place of expense	Description of charge	Currency	Total in local currency	Exchange rate	Cost in AUD
31/05/2024	Israel	Jerusalem	Cassia Jerusalem	Daily Room Charge	USD	\$300.00	1.505769823	\$ 451.73
1/06/2024	Israel	Jerusalem	Cassia Jerusalem	Daily Room Charge	USD	\$300.00	1.502667941	\$ 450.80
2/06/2024	Israel	Jerusalem	Cassia Jerusalem	Daily Room Charge	USD	\$300.00	1.503075994	\$ 450.92
3/06/2024	Israel	Jerusalem	Cassia Jerusalem	Daily Room Charge	USD	\$300.00	1.496514261	\$ 448.95
5/06/2024	Israel	Tel Aviv-Yafo	Adiv Hotel	Daily Room Charge	USD	\$280.00	1.505687618	\$ 421.59
6/06/2024	Israel	Tel Aviv-Yafo	Adiv Hotel	Daily Room Charge	USD	\$280.00	1.501320627	\$ 420.37
7/06/2024	Israel	Jerusalem	Cassia Jerusalem	Daily Room Charge	USD	\$300.00	1.518068416	\$ 455.42
8/06/2024	Israel	Jerusalem	Cassia Jerusalem	Daily Room Charge	USD	\$300.00	1.518668552	\$ 455.60
9/06/2024	United Arab Emirates	Dubai	Sofitel Dubai Downtown	Package Wrapper	AED	\$600.00	0.413565167	\$ 248.14

Israel – Purpose of Visit

Victoria's Jewish community is the largest in Australia, numbering over 45,000 people. The community is primarily based in the electorates of Caulfield, Malvern Oakleigh, Brighton, and Bentleigh (Southern Metropolitan Region).

The trip to Israel allowed the delegation to partake in a condensed version of the Australia Israeli and Jewish Affairs Council's *Rambam Israel Fellowship Program*.

The aim of the trip was to get a better understanding of Israel's political system, history and challenges faced within the Middle East. This is particularly relevant given the social cohesion issues impacting Victoria's multicultural communities as a result of this complex geopolitical situation.

Furthermore, it allowed members to explore policy ideas and collaboration between Israel and Victoria in the areas of innovation, health, and social policy.

A number of meetings and briefings were organised by AIJAC with organisations such as Industry, Health, Political Leaders and Community organisations to explore collaborative opportunities.

Victoria is well served by a strong and close relationship with Israel, a global leader in technology, finance and entrepreneurship and we can learn a lot from the way Israel has cemented its place as the 'start-up nation'.

The delegation wishes to thank AIJAC for its professionalism, assistance and guidance in organising our visit to Israel.

Dubai – Purpose of Visit

As the financial, tech, and business hub of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Dubai is a crucial economic centre for Australia. The UAE is Australia's largest trade and investment partner in the Middle East. With \$9.3 billion in two-way goods and services trade in 2022, the UAE is Australia's 19th largest trading partner globally.

Statement of Objectives

- Engage with the cultural diversity of Israel and Dubai to learn more about their people.
- To visit Israel after October 7 massacre and learn about the event, the subsequent war and the impact on the people of Israel, Gaza and the world.

- Gain a stronger understanding of the political, social and economic composition of the State of Israel and Dubai.
- To better understand the complex dynamics in the Middle East that are impacting social cohesion in Victoria.
- Build relationships with key government, industry and community Organisations in both countries that would benefit Victoria.
- Investigate programs and initiatives from Israel and Dubai that form policy ideas for Victoria.

Recommendations

Following this trip, this delegation calls on the Victorian Government to:

- Implement reforms to the *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001* to end the rampant antisemitism that has stemmed from the conflict in the Middle East.
- Establish a bipartisan working group to combat antisemitism and restore community safety.
- Expand Holocaust education in the Victorian Curriculum F-10 and better incorporate it into the VCE Curriculum, particularly in Units 3 and 4.
- Establish a stronger Global Victoria and/or Invest Victoria presence in Dubai.
- Develop a clear, publicly available five-year plan to increase Victorian two-way trade with the Middle East.

Hosts (Israel)

Australian/Israel Jewish Affairs Council (AIJAC)

AIJAC is the premier public affairs organisation for the Australian Jewish Community. AIJAC represents the Australian Jewish Community to the Australian Government, politicians, media and other community groups and organisations.

This program annually organizes programs for senior journalists, politicians, political advisors and senior public servants to visit Israel. AIJAC actively engages government on many world political issues such as anti-Israel bias and Islamic extremism.

AIJAC assisted in organising high level meetings with Government, Industry and Community Organisations. In addition, they assisted with transportation and some meals.

Please find attached the itinerary for this visit.

Israel Visit

Saturday 1 June - Jerusalem

Amos Asa-El

The delegation was fortunate to meet with Amotz Asa-El an award-winning journalist and best-selling author. He has been a Jerusalem Post columnist continuously since 1995.

Asa-El is also an author of several books, notably 'The Diaspora and Lost Tribes of Israel' (2004) and other books of Jewish history.

Asa-El's deep knowledge of the history of the Jewish people and their values means he is uniquely tapped into the mood of Jerusalem where he lives. His column is widely read. His points made to us emphasised the role of education for Israeli families and the massive task of the newly created State of Israel as it built from a very low base in 1948/49 to the modern powerhouse of industry and innovation that Israel has become.

Israel's, tech and economic success has many factors behind it. These include the large number of scattered Jews arriving in Israel since 1948 and the fact Israel was able to develop a high degree of agreement across the political divide (until recently) on the development of a sustainable model of capitalism.

There are many unifying aspects for Jews in Israel, the need to protect the community and the challenge of neighbouring countries as threats (at least until the 1980s) which is still the case for some key neighbours. Military service for men (and women now) has been a unifying factor. It is also true to say that during the 1980s there was a high degree of agreement concerning the need for stable economic growth underpinned by financial stability and economic reform.

The lengthy meeting with Asa-El was a great introduction to the background history of the Jewish people which has informed our understanding providing baseline knowledge for our visit. We thank him for the generous time devoted to meeting with us.

Tour of Jerusalem

Lead by tour guide, Roley, The Delegation toured the City of Jerusalem. The city holds great significance for the 3 monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

The Delegation visited many Holy sites including the Temple Mount, the Dome of the Rock, the Garden of Gethsemane, the Church of All Nations, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the Western Wall, and a lookout that overlooked a 3,000-year-old Jewish cemetery.

The absence of tourists was striking. The tour guide remarked that it was the first time in her life she has seen holy and sacred sites with no queues. It is a visible sign of the affect that the war is having on Israel.

It was beautiful to see many gather to pray at the Western Wall, a sacred Jewish site that was part of the original Second Holy Jewish Temple and the only part of to survive the destruction in 70AD.

Jonathan Spyer - Founder and Director of the Middle East Centre for Reporting and Analysis.

British-Israeli analyst, journalist, and specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs, Jonathan Spyer, met with the delegation and spoke broadly about historic and current issues in the region. The discussion was an important opportunity to hear from both an analyst and expert about driving motivations around the current conflict and discuss potential future behaviour of nations in the region and more broadly.

The discussion came at the time of the Biden Administration proposing a ceasefire, which offered the group an opportunity to consider competing issues facing each party to the conflict, including the fact that at the time 124 hostages were still being held by Hamas terrorists.

Sunday 2 June - Jerusalem

Tour of the City of David

The Delegation visited the City of David, one of the most important and significant archaeological sites in the world. Not that long ago, the Jerusalem of King David was believed to have been situated within the Old City Walls. In 1997 Dr. Eilat Mazar, an archaeologist proposed after much research that the City of David in fact sat outside of the Old City. She applied to test her theory and after almost a decade of waiting, she received the funding to excavate.

After years of careful digging, many ancient artifacts, including royal seals, ancient coins, and a palace consistent with that of King Davids have been discovered.

The Delegation had the rare opportunity to visit some of the current dig site that are not yet open to the public. These sacred sites hold incredible history for Jews and Christians alike. The dig is uncovering undeniable Jewish History and provided an opportunity to walk the stairs that Jesus walked.

Yad Vashem

World Holocaust Remembrance Centre.

Yad Vashem is more than a museum; it is a broader world remembrance site that commemorates the victims of the Holocaust. The delegation commenced the visit in the central Museum building.

The Holocaust Centre has the broadest original document and artifact collection in the world, including firsthand letters, photographs, and testimony. Each room is as powerful as the next, including the hall which houses a mock ghetto that includes cobbled flooring and tram tracks donated to the museum. Perhaps the most powerful hall is the final cylindrical space 'the Hall of Names', which sets out records around the cylinder, with the names of the four and a half million known Jews that were murdered. There are still over one million Jews, of the six million murdered, whose names are still unknown.

The delegation also had the opportunity to visit an outdoor commemoration and two other museums. The outdoor 'Avenue of the Righteous Among the Nations' provides a walkway and tree commemoration for those who the State of Israel recognises as those who supported the Jewish community throughout the Holocaust. The delegation also visited the Hall of Remembrance, where official ceremonies occur, and the Children's Memorial. The Children's memorial was particularly moving, given that the pavilion exhibit is dark, and tens of thousands of stars are projected around the space, commemorating those children murdered.

Yad Vashem is a significant site for remembrance and education, that comprehensively enables all visitors an opportunity to better understand the Holocaust. The group also visited part of the site that has been sponsored by Gandel Philanthropy who are involved with running one of the largest Holocaust education programs, sending teaching to Israel from around Australia.

Hadassah Mount Scopus

As Liberal members of the Victorian Parliament we were honoured to meet representatives of the Hadassah Hospital at its Mount Scopus campus on Sunday 2nd of June.

Hadassah, founded over 100 years ago, is supported by Jewish community donations from around the world. It treats sick people of all backgrounds without fear or favour.

The hospital has however played a very significant role in treating patients in the aftermath of the 7 October Hamas attack on Israel, treating acutely sick and injured patients immediately and now beginning the long task of rehabilitating those who require this intensive support to return to normal life as completely as possible.

We met a soldier, Sholomo, who had massive injuries on October 7 after he had rejoined the IDF despite an earlier set of injuries in 2014. As a paramedic he wanted to utilise his skills but he was caught in heavy fighting and the victim of an improvised explosive from Hamas. His widespread injuries included shrapnel injuries, injuries to his head and neck and chest as well his left arm and right hand. Sholomo was in a very serious position.

He was lifted by helicopter from Gaza to Hadassah and may not have survived without the hospital's support, and likely without the Kevellar (check spelling) helmet sent to him by his mother through his sister which he was wearing when hit.

Now he has commenced the long road to rehabilitation at the magnificent new Rehabilitation Hospital funded through the generous donations of the Gandel family from Australia. We can be proud that an Australian family has made such a significant contribution supporting the health of the Israeli people, coming just as the modern capacity is needed.

One additional point to note is the basement of the new hospital has been converted into a mothballed hospital available for times of urgent need. This remarkable feat was stood up in less than a week and has been fitted out with the most modern equipment.

Dr Eran Lerma – former Deputy for Foreign Policy and International Affairs at Israel's National Security Council.

The delegation had an opportunity to meet with Dr. Eran Lerman former Deputy for Foreign Policy and International Affairs at Israel's National Security Council. He also served as Director of the American Jewish Committee's Israel/Middle East office and Deputy Director for Intelligence Production at the Israel Defence Forces' Directorate of Military Intelligence.

Monday 3 June

Tour of Kibbutz Kfar Aza

The delegation toured Kibbutz Kfar Aza, one of the communities devastated by the October 7 terrorist attacks. Our tour was led by Ralph Lewinsohn, a resident of the Kibbutz and an October 7 survivor whose daughter lives in Melbourne.

Ralph showed the delegation the extent of the destruction wrought by Hamas. He said that many in the Kibbutz will never return, whilst those who have continue to be plagued by a shared community trauma.

It may take as long as five years for the Kibbutz to rebuild.

Tour of Kibbutz Be'eri guided by Danny Majzner.

Kibbutz Beerli was another site was stormed by Hamas and Islamic Jihadists on 7 October. Our tour was led by Danny Majzner, one of the survivors of the massacre.

The Delegation started the tour in front of his sister's home, where she was murdered at roughly 12:30pm on the day of the massacre. She was an Australian citizen. Danny last spoke to her at 12:09pm, his niece spoke to her (her mother) at 12:20pm just before terrorists stormed her home and killed her. She was one of many.

On the morning of the massacre, Danny was riding his bike at 6:30am, something he does every Saturday morning. Suddenly, he could see rockets coming from Gaza. There were so many that he described them as being "like fireworks". He stopped and talked to his neighbour Carmel who was heading out for a jog. She was kidnapped later that day by Hamas and has been held hostage in Gaza for well over 240 days. Her brother and niece where also taken hostage that day and have since been released. Her mother was murdered.

At 7am at siren went off and everyone started to take cover in their bomb shelters, however the "men in green bandanas" where already at the Kibbutz.

By 8am, the WhatsApp group for the Kibbutz was inundated with messages that continued for the rest of the day informing them that people were being murdered, taken hostage and that their homes where being burnt.

By midday, there were around 300 terrorists storming the Kibbutz. It took 6 hours for the IDF to get in, but they were outnumbered. Danny said that the "the terrorists killed us, they butchered us".

The people in the Kibbutz all took shelter in their bomb shelters, but it was beyond their imagination that what they were about to experience was an attack of the scale and nature. Many where murdered inside their shelters, which didn't have lockable doors, because none where prepared for a terrorist invasion.

The Kibbutz that used to be home to hundreds of Israelis is now destroyed and desolate. Only a handful of people live there now. It is empty because some were murdered,

others taken hostage, others because their homes were destroyed, and others are too traumatised to return.

Everyone from the Delegation was profoundly impacted by the destruction that had taken place at the hands of terrorists.

Re'im (Nova) Music Festival Massacre

On the morning of 7 October, Hamas terrorists attacked dance goers at the Re'im (Nova) Music Festival, killing over three hundred and sixty young people, and taking forty hostages. The festival site was situated near the Re'im Kibbutz, roughly six kilometres from the Gazan border. The festival ran between 6 and 7 October.

Around the central commemorative space still sit the concrete rectangular bomb shelters where many of the young Israelis tried to hide from the terrorists. In many of those small cramped spaces you can see the bullet and bomb marks from the terrorists, which sharply haunt how cold bloodedly so many young people were killed that day. Surrounding shrub land still stands burnt, showing where the terrorists burnt the site in an effort to kill hiding young victims.

It is hard to put into words the profound impact of visiting the site of such recent horror. However, the delegation visited the site in silence and spent significant time moving amongst the profoundly impactful commemoration.

Gil Troy

Our delegation met with Gil Troy, who is an award-winning American presidential historian, leading Zionist activist, and professor at McGill University. He has been designated as one of the top 100 people "positively influencing Jewish life".

Gil spoke about Zionism, and its meaning. He spoke about being active not silent, particularly given recent events from October 7 onwards.

He emphasized the importance of understanding historical context to appreciate current political dynamics.

Tuesday 4 June

Olga Deutsch – Vice President, NGO Monitor

Vice President of the global research organisation providing oversight to the non-government organisations, Olga Deutsch met with the delegation. Much of the discussion focussed on the current conflict in the Middle East and the lack of transparency over the

estimated \$40 billion in world donations in the name of Palestinian support. Part of the discussed focused on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine. It has been reported that the entity, which Australia froze donations towards before re-commencing them, was found to have twelve employees with links to the 7 October Hamas terrorist attack. The delegation also discussed the lack of human rights and social advancement in Hamas-controlled Gaza.

Knesset of Israel.

The Knesset, or in our terms, is the Parliament of Israel. It is a single legislative Chamber, comprising one hundred and twenty members. The delegation had the opportunity to both tour the Knesset, in session, and meet with Knesset members of the Australia Israel Friendship Group.

The delegation received a tour of the Knesset, which included an opportunity to sit in the Chamber. The delegation watched the end of a session and saw the secure public seating space, where a large card for each hostage is placed on seats, facing the Chamber. The cards are a reminder to Knesset members every day that the Chamber sits. A number of striking differences between the Knesset and our Parliament is: the incorporation of technology into the way a member votes by touchscreen at their seat; the level of accountability including a live public report on whether a member is in the Knesset building; and the style of election (effectively being a proportional representative system with some similarities to the New Zealand list system).

The delegation also had the opportunity meet with members of the Australia Israel Friendship Group. On that day, we met with Yasmin Fridman and Elazar Stern (we would meet with Ohad Tal at a separate time). The meeting with the two Knesset friendship members provided a unique opportunity to convey the depth of Australian sentiment on the conflict in the Middle East and the hurt many feel about the 7 October attack. The Knesset members sought to understand the change in Australia's position towards Israel, felt by many members of the Knesset. It was noted by the delegation that there had been a change in Federal Government to the Labor Party. The Knesset members expressed their views about the Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs.

Ashley Perry - Former Advisor to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, to Deputy Dir-General for Communication and Public Relations.

The delegation was presented with a chance to meet with Mr Ashley Perry.

Mr Perry outlined the Oslo Accord and provided important political, historical and social context.

Wednesday 5 June

Khaled Abu Toameh,

Khaled Abu Toameh, a veteran award-winning journalist, and TV producer who specialises in Palestinian affairs presented to the Delegation. He is a Palestinian Affairs Correspondent for the Jerusalem Post, and was previously a senior presenter at NBC News, and a producer for several newspapers and TV stations including the BBC. He has been published in several newspapers around the world, including the Wall Street Journal, US News and World News. He is a well-known and respected voice locally and internationally.

He has vast experience working in international media, working as a consultant for reputable news organisations in the West Bank and Gaza.

The Delegation heard his view of political and cultural interactions between Palestinians and Israelis. What made the presentation extremely valuable is that he is an Arab citizen of Israel who currently lives in Jerusalem. His diverse background and experience gave the Delegation a well-rounded view and insightful view of the current conflict.

Palestinian officials - Ammar Hijazi, 'Ambassador Assistant Minister for Multilateral Affairs MOFA - State of Palestine' and another Palestinian Authority Colleague (along with Australian East Jerusalem/Ramallah based Australian diplomatic officials)

First, prior to connecting via online video with the Palestinian officials, our delegation spoke with the Australian Representatives to the Palestinian Territories, Edward Russell and Deputy Head of Post, Craig Gilbert.

We discussed UNRWA and the underground Hamas infrastructure in place. We discussed that the person we would be meeting with works for the Palestinian Authority Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and that it was a Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO)/Israel agreement to establish the Palestinian Authority (PA). They stated that the PA is a creature of the PLO.

We then joined an online video conversation with Ambassador Hijazi, held from a hotel in East Jerusalem, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade advised against travelling to Ramallah.

Ambassador Hijazi spoke about the atrocity being committed against the people in Gaza. He stated that Israel is forcing Palestinian Gazan civilians to either leave Gaza, or risk being killed.

The Ambassador expressed his view that the Palestinian people are seeking freedom, independence, and legal rights. He states that people in Gaza are facing terrible conditions, which he described as “genocide”.

The Ambassador noted previous attempts at peace had not been successful.

With respect to October 7, the Ambassador avoided addressing the atrocities on the day, and generally stated that armed resistance is a legitimate right. He stated that October 7 was a result of years of oppression, destruction and violence against the Palestinian people. He stated that the PA is looking for diplomacy over arms and is at odds with Hamas. He noted that the PA disagreed with Hamas.

When a member of the delegation asked about releasing the hostages held in Gaza, the Ambassador did not state a position.

Given the social cohesion challenges Victoria is facing, it was important for the delegation to hear this alternative view, which frames the concerns of some in the Victorian community.

Immigrant Absorption Centre

Immigrant Absorption Centres in Israel, also known as "Merkaz Klitah," are facilities established to assist new immigrants of Jewish heritage in their transition to life in Israel. These centres offer a range of services and programs designed to help immigrants integrate into Israeli society.

These services typically include the assistance of accommodations, language courses, and cultural orientation, which are crucial for new immigrants adjusting to a new country.

The lived-in arrangement with other immigrants enables new arrivals to develop and build a supportive community network.

The centre delivers intensive Hebrew language courses (Ulpan Programs), assisting immigrants to overcome language barriers and better integrate into society.

Some centres offer job placement services, workshops, and training to help immigrants seek out employment.

Dinner with Israeli startups hosted by the Australia-Israel Chamber of Commerce (AICC) (Paul Israel and Benny Weizman)

The delegation attended a dinner, hosted by the AICC, with a variety of Israeli startups in the fields of energy, the arts, agriculture, technology, and software. The AICC is an Israel-based independent non-profit organisation that is dedicated to promoting international trade and relations. The AICC administers the Global Victoria presence in

Israel and seeks to build stronger two-way trade links. Israel is the start-up capital of the world and is home to 10% of the world's unicorns.

The delegation had a wide-ranging discussion on trade policy and opportunities for collaboration with Israeli start-ups. Attendees included Sharonna Karni Cohen, the founder of Dreame, and Alex Dikman, the Managing Partner of Lumir, which partners with expanding Israeli tech companies at the early to mid-growth stages.

Thursday 6 June

Northern Border Tour

The delegation toured the Northern Borders and were briefed by an IDF reservist.

The Israel Defence Forces (IDF) reserves as a crucial component of Israel's military capabilities. The reserve forces are composed of former conscripts and officers who have completed their mandatory service in the IDF.

The reserves are essential for Israel's defence strategy. They allow for a rapid and substantial expansion of the military's manpower, ensuring that the IDF can respond effectively to large-scale conflicts.

Reserve duty is mandated by law, and failure to report for duty can result in legal consequences. However, reservists are also protected by laws that require employers to release them from work for reserve duty without penalty.

Israelis balance their military responsibilities with civilian careers and family life. The government provides various forms of support to help manage this dual obligation, such as compensation for lost wages and benefits.

The IDF reserve system is a unique and integral part of Israel's defence framework, reflecting the country's reliance on its citizen soldiers to maintain security and preparedness.

Alma Research and Education Centre - Sarit Zehavi

We met with Sarit Zehavi, who is the founder and CEO of the Alma Research and Education Centre. The Alma Centre is an Israeli think tank focused on security

challenges facing Israel, particularly from its northern borders. Zehavi is a former Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) officer with extensive experience in military intelligence, who served for 15 years and reached the rank of Lt. Colonel.

Zehavi explained that the Alma Research Centre conducts research and provides educational programs on issues related to Hezbollah, Iran, and other regional threats.

It aims to inform and educate both the public and policymakers about the strategic environment in the Middle East, emphasising the importance of understanding the security dynamics in Lebanon, Syria, and beyond.

She noted that the Centre offers briefings, reports, and field tours to convey in-depth knowledge about the complex geopolitical situation facing Israel.

She also showed us footage and data related to Hezbollah, with attacks on UN convoys, starting fires, attack on a winery, etc. She noted the various incidents of sporadic attacks and incursions from the north, and the huge security risk posed by Hezbollah, with their amount of military personnel, weaponry and international backing (including from Iran).

Kfar Vradim Community Security Post.

The delegation visited the Northern community of Kfar Vradim, situated just over ten kilometres from the Lebanon border, and met with the stationed community security personal. The meeting was an opportunity to understand how volunteer-based security, stationed across communities in Israel operate from a practical perspective. Each unit is volunteer based and provided with based uniforms and hardware. Much of their actual infrastructure, including vehicles and more sophisticated uniforms, have been purchased with the support of fundraising. The delegation also heard how the unit and community had set up a local medical capacity.

Kinneret Academic College, the Jewish National Fund Innovation Centre and the ANZAC site at Tzemach train station.

In a joint presentation from the College and the Jewish National Fund, the delegation was briefed on the investment being made into a new innovation hub at the site. The College has recognised the need to drive innovation in agricultural communities, like those surrounding the Kinneret Academic College on the Sea of Galilee. The College found that in 2018, although 87 percent of graduates wanted to stay in the region, only 3 percent did because of a lack of employment opportunities. It should be noted that of the 11,647 startups in Israel only 877 are in agriculture (less than 10 percent). The innovation hub now provides a link between farmers with agricultural problems, and students who work

to solve them. Students then have the intellectual property right to commercialise the solution. During the briefing, the delegation met with BeeFree Agro, founded by a former student who has developed drone capacity to assist with farming – through scanning livestock (for number and potential sickness) and the security of farm fencing. The company expressed a strong interest in working with Australia but had not yet broken into our market.

The delegation then had the opportunity to visit the ANZAC site at Tzemach train station, which commemorates the Battle of Tzemach, which many consider the last cavalry battle in history. The site includes recognition of Aboriginal involvement in World War One, including that over 1,500 Aboriginal people enlisted. That recognition includes a large bronze statue of an Aboriginal soldier and his horse, as he pays tribute to his fellow fallen soldiers. The site also includes nineteen trees, one for each of the nineteen fallen Australian soldiers during the battle.

Those maintaining the site noted that despite continuing efforts, the current Federal Government was not providing any funding support for important ANZAC site's maintenance.

Friday 7 June

Lt. Col. (R) Peter Lerner

Director General of the International Relations Division, Israel Defence Forces.

The delegation had a unique opportunity to meet with Lt. Col. (R) Peter Lerner and discuss the Middle East conflict. Lerner, who was soon to retire from the armed forces, held a unique role in being an English-speaking spokesperson for the Israeli forces. Lerner spoke candidly about the difference between the truth and perception and the broader challenges of managing the media. He also spoke about the difficulty of the Hamas controlled Palestinians delivering an international message and being quoted as fact, without any account for the entity being a terrorist led one that is by design spreading misinformation and mistruths.

Dr Ralph King - Australian Ambassador to Israel

The delegation met with Dr Ralph King, the Australian Ambassador to Israel, at the Department of Foreign Affairs office in Tel Aviv. The Ambassador provided a wide ranging briefing on regional issues, the Middle East conflict, the ceasefire proposal put

forward by the Biden Administration, and community sentiment towards those issues both locally and in Australia.

The delegation briefed the Ambassador on its work, and noted that when visiting Kibbutz Be'eri, a joint Australian citizen raised their concern that his family had contacted the office of the Foreign Minister on 7 October but had to date received no response. The delegation also noted that citizens, members of the Knesset, and government staff had all raised their concern about the change in the Australia Government's position towards Israel, specifically raising concerns about the Foreign Minister (including her refusal to visit terrorist attacked sites on her visit to Israel).

The delegation also spoke with the Ambassador about the strong Australian concern for the 124 hostages (at that time) and sought to understand what the Australian Government was doing to add pressure on the need to ensure their safety and safety return. The issue of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine was also discussed. The Ambassador provides his assurances that the Australian Government was part of a strong international push on the entity to improve its levels of accountability.

Western Wall (Shabbat Prayers).

The West side of the temple, in old Jerusalem, the Western Wall, is one of the holiest Jewish sites. On Shabbat, Friday evening, many Jews travel to the wall to pray and celebrate. The delegation took the opportunity to join thousands of Jewish people as they prayed.

On Friday evening, the group had dinner at the home of Rabbi Ian and Rebbetzin Rachel Pear. This included a visit from Ohad Tal MK, a Member of the Knesset and former world director of Bnei Akiva, the largest Zionist movement in the world. This was a unique opportunity for the delegation to enjoy the important cultural experience of a Shabbat dinner in Jerusalem, and gain insights into the current state of Israeli politics.

Saturday 8 June

The Dead Sea and the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The delegation viewed the Dead Sea, which sits between Israel and Jordan. The sea is salt watered, hence the name, because the high salinity prohibits much normal animal and plant life. The sea is also the lowest point on Earth. Nearby to the sea, the delegation also had the opportunity to view the cave where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered. The scrolls are the longest surviving written text in existence and include biblical canon.

Sunday 9 June

Mark Regev – Chair of the Abba Eban Institute at Reichman University

We met with Mark Regev, who along with his current role was Israel's Ambassador to the UK from 2016-20 and the PM's Advisor and International Spokesperson from 2007-16.

He gave an extremely insightful presentation.

He articulately outlined and defended Israel's policies and actions on the international stage, including the right of Israel to defend itself against terrorism and aggression, particularly from groups like Hamas and Hezbollah.

He spoke about the need for a strong and secure Israel, highlighting the country's security concerns and the threats it faces from neighbouring entities.

He talked about his support for the pursuit of peace through negotiations, but maintained that Israel's security needs must be prioritised in any peace agreement.

He underscored the importance of international understanding and support for Israel's position, aiming to counteract what he sees as misinformation and bias against Israel in global media and political discourse.

Additionally, he highlighted Israel's democratic values and its role as a stable democracy in a volatile region.

He spoke about the ongoing Israel conflict, particularly focusing on Israel's strategies and responses to the threats posed by Hamas and Hezbollah. He emphasised Israel's right to defend itself and the importance of minimising civilian casualties, despite the complex urban warfare environment in Gaza. He defended Israel's tactics to avoid civilian harm [such as distributing leaflets], while stressing the challenges posed by Hamas using civilian areas for military purposes.

He also addressed the issue of hostages taken by Hamas, and expressed frustration with the international pressure on Israel, arguing that it often overlooks the provocations and attacks that Israel faces.

In discussions about broader regional dynamics, he noted the increasing threats from Hezbollah in Lebanon, drawing parallels with the tactics used by Hamas in Gaza. He highlighted the need for vigilance and a robust defensive posture to counter these threats effectively.

Dubai

Monday 10 June

Morning tea briefing with Australian Deputy Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates Warren King, Chairman of the Australian Business Council of Dubai Dr Naim Maadad, and General Manager of the Australian Business Council of Dubai Joanne Crowther

The delegation met with diplomatic and business officials to discuss Australia's current engagement with Dubai and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) as a whole.

The conversation focused on trade and investment opportunities between Australia and UAE particularly focussing around the upcoming Free Trade Agreement. Some of the key areas included innovation, renewables, technology and how the regulatory environment compares to Australia.

We identified key trade opportunities between Victoria and the UAE, which David Southwick will seek to further develop in his capacity as Shadow Minister for Trade and Investment.

Tuesday 11 June

Dinner + Q&A - UAE's Sheik Mohammed Centre for Cultural Understanding

Our delegation had the opportunity to experience UAE's Sheik Mohammed Centre for Cultural Understanding, with a dinner and opportunity for a Q&A with the centre.

Seated in a traditional manner and experiencing traditional Emirati food we had a cultural presentation from the centre to help us understand the different Arabic traditions.

Various members of our delegation asked questions about marriage and divorce, the role and rights of women in and out of marriage and divorce, the situation with UAE government enforced sermons at Mosques, and so forth.

While these questions were answered well, and women relatively have more rights in the UAE than in some other Islamic nations, we felt that the Emirati woman speaking could not openly express perhaps all her views on women's rights openly due to cultural expectations, maintaining her work role, etc.

Conclusion

The trip was an insightful experience and provided important background to a conflict that is impacting thousands of people in the Victorian community. Whilst Victoria's strong multicultural fabric is an essential part of what makes our state great, the horrific events of October 7 have posed significant social cohesion challenges.

This trip provided important historical, political, and cultural insights into the source of this current tension. We have seen firsthand the importance of strong, robust anti-hate measures in schools and society, and note the threat extremism poses to social cohesion across the world. As a result, the delegation has identified a number of policy opportunities we may adopt in Victoria to ensure that our vibrant, multicultural state remains united.

In addition, meetings with business leaders and other parliamentarians, have provided a number of other policy ideas we will seek to develop on return to Australia.