

## Ottawa Journal by David Tilson MP ? Federal government joins in celebrating Israel's independence

This year, April is home to two of the most important holidays in Israel, Yom Ha'zikaron and Yom Ha'Atzmaut. For Yom Ha'zikaron, many Jews across Canada and the rest of the world will gather in solidarity for memorial ceremonies. Yom Ha'zikaron, or Israel's Day of Remembrance for Fallen Soldiers and Victims of Terror, is a solemn day to think about and commemorate those who have tragically lost their lives in defence of Israel ? both soldiers and civilian victims. The conclusion of Yom Ha'zikaron coincides with the start of Yom Ha'Atzmaut. This important celebration marks Israel's Independence Day ? the anniversary of the signing of the Israeli Declaration of Independence. This holiday also commemorates the realization of the Jewish people's right to self-determination. This year marks 67 years of Israeli independence and our government is proud to celebrate not only Israel's independence, but warm Canada-Israel relations based on fundamental, shared values. It is a time to celebrate the many successes Israel has enjoyed, including how the country has remained a vibrant, strong, and open democracy in the face of adversity and threats to its very existence. Our government continues to strengthen Canada's bond with Israel in many ways. 2015 marks the 18th anniversary of the Canada-Israel Free Trade Agreement (CIFTA), and our two countries continue to enjoy strong bilateral relations. In recent years, this has been enhanced in such areas as public security, defence, trade and investment, while at the same time the Canadian-Jewish community continues to help keep the relationship between our two countries strong. Indeed, last year Prime Minister Stephen Harper made a historic trip to Israel ? the first visit to Israel by a Canadian Prime Minister since 2000. While he was there, the Prime Minister was given the distinct honour of addressing the Knesset, a first for any Canadian Prime Minister. He took the opportunity to reaffirm the strong relationship between our two nations by stating it is, ?a Canadian tradition to stand for what is principled and just, regardless of whether it is convenient or popular . . . therefore, through fire and water, Canada will stand with you.? During this visit, Prime Minister Harper and Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister of Israel, also witnessed the signing of a Canada-Israel Strategic Partnership Memorandum of Understanding, renewing our commitment to work together. Prime Minister Harper and our government will continue to take these strong, principled actions because we recognize that the Jewish people's right to their homeland and their right to defend it, is fundamentally in-line with Canada's values and interests. I hope all my constituents will join me in wishing the State of Israel peace and prosperity in the year ahead.

