




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR CHATSWORTH

Record of Proceedings, 19 May 2020

ADJOURNMENT

State of Israel

 **Mr MINNIKIN** (Chatsworth—LNP) (7.12 pm): Many members would be aware that when I was first elected many years ago I set up the Parliamentary Friends of Israel, and I appreciate the bipartisan support from both sides of the chamber. Many times in the last few years I have been asked whether I would like to visit Israel as part of a study tour. Regrettably, every time I have been invited it coincided with a parliamentary sitting week, so obviously the answer was no. Towards the back end of last year there was a spare position on the New South Wales parliamentary delegation to Israel, which was to be held in the middle of January this year. I was able to accept that.

I will say for the benefit of the House that the airfare and accommodation was fully paid for by myself, and it was worth every cent. To say that it was probably one of the most fascinating tours I have ever undertaken is an understatement. Over the course of the week in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv we undertook a range of meetings. In fact, it was a very intense schedule. We literally started around about 6.30 am with breakfast on the coach and then away we would go.

It was not exactly a Contiki tour, because the sorts of places we went to included Ramallah in the West Bank and a little town called Sderot, which I will come back to towards the end of this quick speech. In terms of seeking balance, we also met representatives from the Palestinian National Authority as well as the Israeli government. It was truly fascinating. We went to the Gaza border; we went to the Lebanese border; we went to tunnels which Hezbollah had only just recently dug a few weeks earlier. We saw tanks, we saw planes, we saw you name it. Most importantly, the purpose of the trip was to get a better understanding. That better understanding included a combination of MPs from all sides of the chamber—predominantly New South Wales, obviously—but I was privileged to be asked to attend.

Many of us visit our schools and we are sometimes there when they have fire drills. I was in the little town of Sderot when they had a drill of their own kind—a 30-second warning to say that in a matter of eight seconds rockets would be coming over from the Gaza border into Sderot. All of the kids sprung into action; they knew exactly what to do. It was very sobering and it reminded me with a passion just how fortunate we are to live in this state and in this country. I know that when I did this trip—which was about 17 to 23 January—the world well and truly changed not long after I returned. I will say that, despite our differences and despite the divide ideologically between this side of the chamber and that, there are some things in life that unite all humanity, and it really puts it on display when you go to Israel.