



**Israeli Independence Day Gala
Yom Ha'Zikaron/Yom Ha'Atzmaut**

**Given by Mark B. Rosenberg
on April 20, 2010**



This speech was presented to attendees of the Israeli Independence Day Gala, hosted by Israeli Consul Ofer Bavly and the Aventura Turnberry Jewish Center, on April 20, 2010.

Thank you very much! I am grateful to the Aventura Turnberry Jewish Center for hosting this independence day celebration!

I want to thank Ofer Bavly for the honor that he brings to me and to FIU for this opportunity to speak with you on such an important event that is celebrated by Jewish people worldwide.

My university – your university – a public institution with over 41,000 students, and Israel have much in common. We are both relatively new. We both are beacons of hope for peoples who seek new opportunities.

So before I speak to the Israel that I know and am proud of, let me anticipate my message by telling you that in celebration of Israeli independence, I will be asking three things of you:

- 1) Be proud of Israel and what it has accomplished in such a short period of time.
- 2) Support Israel – this is a country where – we could all go and immediately call home!
- 3) Tell the Story of Israel – there is something there for everybody!

You know the facts about Israel:

- A country that at its independence was just over 600,000 people;
- A population now of just over 7 million people;
- The size of New Jersey;
- The diversity of the Balkan States;
- In the 1990s alone, absorbed nearly 1.2 million immigrants;
- Had historically high rates of growth of its GDP;
- Has a robust export sector, particularly in high tech. This is the envy of every country seeking to diversify its economy.
- Was one of the first countries to provide state of the art aid to Haiti by setting up a field hospital in the country just 36 hours after disaster struck there.

Today, as before, there is continuing concern about Israel's future.

As a political scientist, I can tell you that much of this concern swirls around the bilateral challenges between the US and Israel, and the real threats out there – now from Iran – to Israel's existence.

But tonight, let's pause and leave the debate and doubts behind – for another day.

Instead, I want to remind you that beyond the politics of the moment, we have real challenges ahead to improve the lot of the Jewish people and more generally to be mindful of the fact that we can do better as human beings to address critical issues of health and well being that continue to plague us globally. Despite rising wealth and prosperity, globally, there are still nearly 1 billion people globally who live as the bottom billion. They live in grinding poverty and have little or no help! They are on the margins, and have little or no hope.

How does Israel fit in here?

Remember Gold Meir's famous assessment of her country's geography: "Moses dragged us for 40 years through the desert to bring us to the one place in the Middle East where there was no oil."

Has the absence of oil been a curse or a blessing?

For many of us, particularly in our university, Israel is a symbol of curiosity, study, and finally, hope. Israel has done what we have done as a university: Israel has continually and repeatedly, turned the impossible into the inevitable. It is a symbol of how to use the blessings of knowledge and know-how to identify and solve problems, to improve the quality of life.

In their book, "Start-Up Nation," authors Dan Senor and Saul Singer point to Israel as one of the world's leading techno-nations. It made this transformation in just about 30 years. If you were there in 1970, as I was, it was an agricultural country. Return thirty years later, as I did – it is bathed in high tech!

Civilian research-and-development expenditures are about 5% of the gross domestic product – nearly double the level of the US or South Korea. Venture capital investment per capita is nearly 3 times that of the US. According to the authors, even in absolute terms, Israel has only the US – as a competitor.

The authors quote an e-Bay executive who says that "The best-kept secret is that we [referring to Google, Cisco, Microsoft, Intel and eBay] – companies that 20 years ago barely existed at all-- all live and die by the work of our Israeli teams." They clearly state that there are more innovative ideas coming out of Israel today than out of Silicon Valley.

At FIU, we are very interested in this important development. We understand that 21st century competitiveness will pivot around innovation in the knowledge based economy.

How is this happening amidst the heavy risk associated with a conflict zone?

Listen to the authors:

“The tight proximity of research universities, large firms and start-ups, a talent pool drawn from around the world, and an ecosystem of venture capital and military and other government R&D funding.”

They point to Israel’s unique entrepreneurial culture – combining individualism, egalitarianism –organizational informality and nurturing.

Let me give you some examples:

- A Galilee-based textile company –Shalag--will invest \$17 million in building a new manufacturing plant in Oxford North Carolina that will use its innovative non-woven textile process to generate over 100 new jobs. These jobs will pay on average \$6,000 higher per position than similar manufacturing facilities in the state.
- Another company, Else – a subsidiary of Emblaze – has developed a cell phone device called First Else – that will potentially replace the I-Phone as the gold standard in Smart Phones. With high definition and a longer-lasting battery, this is something to follow.
- Israeli Entrepreneur Shair Agassi and his company, Better Place, are set to debut their electric cars and recharging networks in what could be a global transportation changer.
- Finally, for those of us who love music: Israeli band J.Viewz has created a brand new fusion of electronic music and soul-moving musical elements that's being embraced in New York and all over the US. And the Israeli trance-electronic sound is another major popular music export that is global! I recommend Infected Mushroom!

What is my point: The glass is half full – of energy, entrepreneurship, and chutzpah. Even with all the current political challenges, we can draw so many lessons from Israeli development and innovation.

Tonight is renewal – for Israel, and for us. So I want to end brief remarks this evening by issuing three challenges to you. These three challenges are similar in direction to those that I will issue to over 5,000 students who will be graduating from our public university, FIU, next week.

I issue these challenges remembering Elie Wiesel’s observation that, “In Jewish history there are no coincidences.” Have a message about Israel. Make it intentional not coincidental. Here are the key points:

They are:

- 1) Have pride in Israel. Understand that this country will always have doors open for Jews, wherever they come from!
- 2) Support Israel – travel there. Buy Israeli products. Support the Jewish Federation. Invest in Israeli companies. Invest in Israeli bonds! Support your temple! The stronger Israel gets, the stronger the Jewish people will be.
- 3) Tell the story – like I have done tonight. About the country's resilience, about its innovation. About its persistence to survive. About its innovation and talent. About its ascendancy in this 21st century knowledge economy. About how we can learn from the country's tale of survival and prosperity.

Mr. Consul – thank you for the honor of being with you tonight!

Happy Birthday Israel!