

Transcript of speech by the Hon. Jason Kenney, P.C, M.P., to the  
Canadian Friends of Haifa University's Mount Carmel Dinner

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Worthy Rabbis, Your Excellency Ambassador Ziv, Parliamentary Colleagues, thank you to so many of you for being here tonight. We have a minyan of Parliamentarians here! President Shapira, friends, ladies and gentlemen.

First let me begin by congratulating my dear friend and predecessor as Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism, the Honourable Gerry Weiner, on receiving the Carmel Award of Merit.

Gerry was the author of Canada's Multiculturalism Act, and has done more than virtually anyone to make Canada's model of pluralism a success. He is indeed worthy of such an honour.

Early in my career I was told that one should begin a speech with a self-deprecating joke. So, as a sign that I don't take myself too seriously, I will begin by comparing myself to Winston Churchill.

In 1948, Churchill received the degree Doctor of Literature from the University of London, one of many such honours conferred on him in his long life. On that occasion, he remarked, "As life has unfolded, I've been astonished to find how many more degrees I have received than I have passed examinations."

Of course, I have received far fewer honorary degrees than Winston Churchill – in fact now hold a grand total of one. But that allows me to say that the number of examinations I have passed far exceeds the number of degrees I have received, so my degree-exam ratio compares rather favourably. Although I must say, President Shapira, I am very happy that the Selection Committee did not ask to inspect my academic transcripts before selecting me.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am truly humbled by the honour bestowed on me today, and I accept it, not just personally, but in the name of the entire team of people with whom I have worked. In particular, I would like to express profound gratitude to the man who has allowed me to pursue my principles in the public square, and who has been a great and dignified leader of democratic principle on the world stage, the Right Honourable Stephen Harper.

I am inspired by the company gathered here to witness this honour, and those of you here to support a most worthy cause. I am deeply grateful to those who judged me worthy to

receive this honour – to the Senate of the University of Haifa, to Amos Shapira and the Executive Committee.

I offer heartfelt thanks also to the Canadian Friends of Haifa University, Dr. Dan and the entire board, and to Dr. Arnie Aberman, Hetty Shapiro and the Tribute Committee, for organizing this wonderful evening.

It is a high point for me, to be included in the company of honorary graduates of the University of Haifa, including many great Canadians, some of whom are here with us tonight – at least one of whom is with us tonight, my friend, the Honorable Bob Rae. Thank you for being here tonight, Bob.

Haifa University's honorary doctorate conferees include courageous and brilliant individuals in every sphere from around the world, including two of my personal heroes: Elie Wiesel and the late giant of human freedom, Vaclav Havel.

The University of Haifa stands as a beacon of tolerance, inclusion, and harmony. It is a sign of hope in the Middle East, and indeed throughout the world. The University of Haifa is a modern institution built in an ancient land; in fact, at Mount Carmel, it is built on sacred land with a special meaning to the monotheistic traditions.

Like the miraculous State of Israel itself, the University is firmly rooted in its Jewish identity, while being welcoming to all. It stands as a hopeful reminder that peaceful pluralism is possible and good, and that unity does not preclude diversity even in the most difficult climate. The freedom to live according to these principles is rare, hard won, and precious.

To the University of Haifa, I say, you inspire me to work even harder to earn the recognition you have honored me with today, and to defend and promote the ideals we share: ideals such as ordered liberty grounded in human dignity, and a pursuit of the common good through democratic means. These are the causes the Jewish community in Canada has always stood for. These are the principles that unite all of us as Canadians, regardless of our race, religion, or partisan conviction. And they are the basis of our friendship with, and support for, the democratic homeland of the Jewish people.

Now, of course, good people will disagree on the application of such principles. This democratic discourse is not only to be expected, it is to be encouraged, protected, and even celebrated in a free society such as ours.

However, the sad and continuing history of anti-Semitism – the most ancient and pernicious form of hatred – tells us that there are those in our world who do not simply disagree over the proper application of democratic principles, but, who disagree with those principles themselves.

And then there are those guilty of what Elie Wiesel calls the sin of indifference, who choose to look the other way rather than face the reality of a resurgent anti-Semitism.

For this reason, we must take a stand.

The University of Haifa is doing just that. It is taking action now to prepare a new generation of Holocaust scholars and educators. It is helping to preserve the memory of the past, while exploring the lessons of the Holocaust for today's world, and for future generations. I am so deeply grateful to everyone here this evening, for your support for this crucial endeavour, and I am proud to be associated with it. The new Holocaust Education Fund will help to ensure that Canadian and international students will be a part of that new generation. Their work will help keep minds from forgetting, and keep hearts from hardening.

Under the leadership of Prime Minister Stephen Harper, I can tell you that Canada will continue to lead the world in Holocaust remembrance, education, and commemoration. Just as we have done at home, as the first government in Canada's history to recognize the injustice of Canada's period of anti-semitic immigration policy and the application of the "none is too many" policy, which deliberately excluded war-time Jewish refugees, most notoriously symbolized by the rejection of the S.S. St. Louis.

We have established a national monument to the St. Louis incident and recognized this tragic past. But we also recognize that there are men and women in this room, survivors, their children and grandchildren, who are a testimony to the fact that Canada redeemed itself to some extent following the war by opening its doors, and welcoming, after Israel and the United States, the largest number of Holocaust survivors in the world.

We have continued in this endeavor by leading Canada's accession to the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research, which Canada will chair and host next year, under the capable leadership of Dr. Mario Silva.

And in 2011 I was honored to sign the Ottawa Protocol on behalf of Canada, building on our work as the leading contributor to the Inter-Parliamentary Coalition for Combating Anti-Semitism. Let me acknowledge the good work of Mario Silva, my colleague Scott Reid, and the Honorable Irwin Cotler for having to have led that important initiative.

We have taken a zero tolerance approach to anti-Semitism both here and abroad. In doing so sometimes we have taken firm, difficult, and sometimes contentious positions. For example, we no longer provide public funding to organizations that apologize for or promote extremism or hatred. Such organizations do not have a right to be funded by the state. We are seeking to promote tolerance and respect, and to oppose racism, not to promote division, discord, and hatred.

We are focusing on the fight against anti-Semitism in our multiculturalism program. And, indeed, we are combating all manifestations of ancient enmities. For example, we are bringing together young Somali Canadians to work in internships in Jewish-owned businesses and professional offices. Last year, we hosted an event for the Dalai Lama to address youth of Chinese heritage. We are working on bringing together young

Canadians of Turkish and Armenian origin, and of Tamil and Sinhalese backgrounds, trying to bridge gaps that are rooted in historical prejudices beyond Canadian shores.

The history of our country is marked by the challenge of inherited prejudices, in every generation. And here I will quote another hero of mine, an immigrant from a country whose citizens brought with them their old grievances to the new world, a leader whose courage and conviction cost him his life, a Father of Confederation, Thomas D'Arcy McGee. He said in 1862, on the topic of what we would today call unity in diversity:

*“We Irishmen, Protestant and Catholic, born and bred in a land of religious controversy, should never forget that now we live and act in a land of the fullest religious and civil liberty. All we have to do is, each for himself, to keep down dissensions which can only weaken, impoverish, and keep back the country... to rise above all low limitations and narrow circumscriptions, to cultivate that true catholicity of spirit which embraces all creeds, all classes, and all races, in order to make of our boundless province, so rich in known and unknown resources, a great new northern nation.”*

Ladies and gentlemen, Canada is well placed to help in the continuing struggle against hatred, against prejudice, and its most ancient expression, anti-Semitism. The reason is simple, and fundamental to our culture, our history, and our future.

As McGee said, we must never forget that we now live and act in a land of the fullest religious and civil liberty. Canada is a free country, formed in the great tradition of the Westminster system of government.

That system arose from, and reinforces, certain habits of ordered liberty, which Canadians have inherited and developed in our own way. Among these habits, crucially, are tolerance and mutual respect, the virtues on which peaceful pluralism depends.

And undergirding it all is an assumption, a correct assumption, backed by experience: that there are indeed such things as truth and falsehood, good and evil, and that we ought to govern ourselves accordingly.

We know that there is such a thing as evil and falsehood because these forces have made themselves all too plain in history, particularly in the history of what John Paul II called the century in tears. That history is especially evident in the lives of those people who survived the Holocaust, and in the revered memories of the six million who did not.

But a knowledge of the terrifying reality of absolute evil and falsehood also presupposes the existence of their opposites: truth and goodness. Our civilization is founded on the belief that the truth is knowable, and that we must therefore try to find and follow it. And that is the mission of the University of Haifa

One truth that we can all agree on is the necessity of continuing our great Canadian tradition of welcoming and integrating newcomers from so many backgrounds and traditions.

Canada has made a great success of its diversity. We have built one of the most peaceful and prosperous societies that the world has ever known.

We have achieved this not by giving up on our long-held values and acceding to cultural and moral relativism, but by our conviction that, while we are enriched by our differences, we are united by our shared traditions and by values vindicated by the test of time.

This conviction, and our experience of successful integration, gives us confidence. It allows us to welcome new Canadians from all parts of the world, while remaining clear eyed and recognizing threats to peace for what they are. It allows us to bridge even the widest chasm.

I will close with one example of a man who believes such bridges are possible. You may be familiar with Dr. Izzeldin Abuelaish. He is a professor in Global Health at the University of Toronto. He is also the author of *I Shall Not Hate: A Gaza Doctor's Journey*.

In his book, he recounts the loss of three of his children, who were accidentally, tragically killed by an Israeli rocket, during a defensive action in 2009. He responded by redoubling his commitment to peace and reconciliation, to public health and the education of girls and women, as a key part of the solution to conflict.

He writes, and I quote:

*“I’m not a prophet, I’m a human being and a believer who is trying to accept that what happened to my family was God’s plan. The perpetrator was man, the violence man-made, but surely my mission is to try my hardest to ensure that the consequences lead to good, not to ever-increasing evil, violence and despair.”*

Dr. Abuelaish reminds us that there is the potential for goodwill everywhere, in spite of even the greatest suffering, something the Holocaust survivors and their families are a testament to.

But goodwill alone is not enough for peace to prevail.

Goodwill needs to be mediated through proven and effective cultural and political institutions – the institutions of representative democracy, ordered liberty, the protection of fundamental rights, and the rule of law that Israel and Canada share and hold dear.

This is the lesson which the Jewish people, and the State of Israel, have taught us all so clearly and consistently. It is what the University of Haifa stands for. It is what Canadians believe in.

Canadian values; Israeli values. The values of anyone who hopes for a more secure and peaceful world.

Thank you, again, for the honour that you have bestowed on me this evening.

May God bless Canada. And may God bless Israel, the ancient and eternal homeland of the Jewish people.