

when waves of refugees arrived here in the desert with nothing, surrounded by hostile armies, it was almost unimaginable that Israel would grow into one of the freest and most successful nations on the Earth.

Yet each one of these transformations took place. And a future of transformation is possible in the Middle East, so long as a new generation of leaders has the courage to defeat the enemies of freedom, to make the hard choices necessary for peace, and stand firm on the solid rock of universal values.

Sixty years ago, on the eve of Israel's independence, the last British soldiers departing Jerusalem stopped at a building in the Jewish quarter of the Old City. An officer knocked on the door and met a senior rabbi. The officer presented him with a short iron bar, the key to the Zion Gate, and said it was the first time in 18 centuries that a key to the gates of Jerusalem had belonged to a Jew. His hands trembling, the rabbi offered a prayer of thanksgiving to God, "who had granted us life and permitted us to reach this day." Then he turned to the officer and uttered the words

Jews had awaited for so long: "I accept this key in the name of my people."

Over the past six decades, the Jewish people have established a state that would make that humble rabbi proud. You've raised a modern society in the promised land, a light unto the nations that preserves the legacy of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. And you have built a mighty democracy that will endure forever and can always count on the United States of America to be at your side.

God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:55 p.m. at the Knesset. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, Speaker of the Knesset Dalia Itzik, and former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of Israel; Dorit Beinisch, president, Supreme Court of Israel; Holocaust survivor, Nobel Prize winner, and author Elie Wiesel; Osama bin Laden, leader of the Al Qaida terrorist organization; and President Mahmud Ahmadi-nejad of Iran. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem May 15, 2008

Thank you all for coming. Never a man to shy away from a microphone. [*Laughter*] I didn't realize it got so cold here in Jerusalem in May. [*Laughter*] Yes, but thanks for coming.

I first want to thank James Snyder and the museum of—folks for hosting this fantastic reception. Mr. President, thanks for joining us, and Mr. Prime Minister, I'm so honored that you all would take time to be here, as I am—members of your cabinet, members of the Knesset. We've got leaders from around the world who are here to share in this fantastic celebration. Laura and I really wanted to come by and

say thanks to our fellow Americans for coming as well.

So I'm driving in the limousine, waving at friendly faces, half of whom seem to be from California or—[*laughter*]. I hope you're having as much fun as we are. It's been a—it's been such a fantastic couple of days for us, and what a fitting way to end with our buddies from the United States of America. You know, Israel has got no closer ally than America, and one of the reasons why is because of the connections between our—citizens of the U.S. and the citizens of Israel.

And so we're thrilled to be with you. We're also honored to be steps away from some of the oldest Biblical texts. I don't know if you've had a chance to go through the museum. I strongly urge you to do so—if they open it up for you like they did—[laughter]. But these documents tell the story of the righteous—of a righteous God and His relationship with an ancient people.

There's no doubt in my mind that the patriarchs of ancient Israel and the pioneers of modern Israel would marvel at the achievements of this nation. I mean, if you really think about it, I doubt few of the prognosticators would have projected Israel to be what it is today: a modern, thriving democracy in the heart of the Middle East. It's been an amazing transformation of dry valleys to fertile lands. And the new technologies being nurtured here are a great testimony to the truest resource of the Israeli people, and that's the brainpower and ingenuity and drive.

I gave a speech today in the Knesset. It was such an honor to stand in that hallowed hall. One of the things I wished I would have projected maybe more clearly was the fact that this is a land of courageous people, people who have had to withstand bombings and suiciders but never lost faith, people who have shown incredible resilience. And it's a nation worthy of our support and a nation worthy of our friendship.

As I said in my speech, I'm—I truly believe that if we stay firm in our resolve, resist the temptation to give in to the terrorists, and believe in the transformative capacity of liberty, someday other nations

in the region will share the blessings of democracy and liberty. Someday they'll know that they'll have governments that respond to the people. They'll build schools instead of bombs; that they'll not want a war with their neighbors, but want to live in peace. And that's the dream, and that's the hope. And I firmly believe it can come true.

I do want to pay tribute to one brave soul, and that is Liviu Librescu. I don't know if you remember him, but he was the teacher at Virginia Tech. His folks live in Israel. I bring him up because it was a courageous act of selflessness—he blocked the doorway to his classroom with his body to allow his students to escape. And I think it's a fitting final statement here in Israel for me to make—to say that, isn't it amazing that a survivor of the Holocaust gave his life for others in the Virginia countryside? And I just want his family to know that we appreciate his courage and that his legacy lives on.

And so thanks for coming. Thanks for honoring a great nation and a worthy friendship. I'm proud to be here on Israeli soil as the President of the United States of America. I'm proud to carry our banner of liberty around the world. And I'm proud to proclaim our deep desire for peace.

Thanks for coming. God bless you. God bless Israel. And God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:40 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to James S. Snyder, director, the Israel Museum; and President Shimon Peres and Prime Minister Ehud Olmert of Israel.

Remarks in a Discussion With Israeli Youth in Jerusalem May 16, 2008

The President. Please sit down. First of all, Laura and I are honored that you'd

join us. Thanks very much for sharing some