

OPERATION PILLAR OF DEFENCE

Australia shows solidarity with Israel

PETER KOHN

ALMOST 1800 members and friends of the Jewish community gathered to show solidarity with Israel in Melbourne on Sunday, at a rally named Code Red: Stop The Rockets.

As the Gaza conflict escalated, the rally was rapidly organised by the Zionist Federation of Australia (ZFA), the Zionist Council of Victoria (ZCV), the Australasian Union of Jewish Students and the Australian Zionist Youth Council, turning a large corner of South Caulfield's Princes Park into a blaze of red-clad attendees.

Holding aloft Israeli flags and placards reading "Code Red: 15 seconds to safety", "Stop Hamas terror" and "Israel has the right to live in peace",

Perth and Brisbane show their support

JEWISH communities in Perth and Brisbane held solidarity rallies for Israel on Sunday, as rocket attacks from Gaza pounded southern Israel and also hit Jerusalem and Tel Aviv.

More than 700 people, clad in red, attended an emergency gathering at Perth's Carmel School.

Liberal MP for Mount Lawley Michael Sutherland joined Deputy Opposition Leader and ALP Upper House MP Kate Dickett to voice support for Israel in the intensifying conflict, as did MP Ian Briza, who represented state Premier Colin Barnett, and former MP Bob Kutner.

In Brisbane, the Jewish community held its scheduled Super AGM Sunday, a day on which constituent organisations under the Queensland Jewish Board of Deputies hold their annual meetings, transforming the event into a solidarity rally for Israel.

More than 50 people, dressed in symbolic red and holding Israeli flags, attended the gathering.

Newly-elected State Zionist Council of Queensland president Tony Levinton put forward a resolution of support for Israel, which was passed by the meeting.

the crowd heard addresses by communal, state and national spokespeople, sang Israeli songs and held a minute's silence for the casualties.

After a siren was sounded, ZFA president Philip Chester read a message from Israeli Ambassador Yuval Rotem, who was attending a similar rally in Canberra. The envoy used a sporting metaphor: "The world's fastest man Usain Bolt runs 200 metres in under 20 seconds. If Usain is that far from a shelter, if a rocket alarm sounds in southern Israel, he won't make it to safety in time.

"The parks of southern Israel are not filled with trees as much as with concrete bunkers."

Senator Scott Ryan

"Hundreds of missiles were fired from Gaza into communities in Israel, into homes, highways and schools. Children had to desert their playgrounds to stay indoors, students had to stay home from school to remain close to a shelter. Workers are disrupting their daily routine repeatedly to take cover. And yet there were no words of condemnation, there were no words of sympathy, as if Israelis are not entitled to these basic human rights," Rotem stated.

Federal Cabinet Secretary Mark Dreyfus drew applause when he relayed a message from Prime Minister Julia Gillard, noting: "You could not want a clearer statement ... nor could you want for any greater clarity of the support that our government gives to Israel at this time."

"When you're talking to people outside the [Jewish] community ... you should make it absolutely clear ... that there is no justification for the rockets, the hundreds and hundreds of rockets that have been sent over the last several years on a daily or weekly basis ... sponsored and organised by Hamas ...

Israel is defending itself as any country would," he said.

Victorian Liberal Senator Scott Ryan, who was set to move a motion in the Senate on Wednesday condemning the recent escalation in rocket attacks against Israel, said: "Last night we all went to bed in peace ... knowing that what might wake us up is our son, our daughter or, at worst, our alarm clock. Millions of people in Israel do not have that luxury.

"The parks of southern Israel are not filled with trees as much as with concrete bunkers painted like those in Sderot so people can get to them within the 15 seconds or less they have from the Code Red signal ... We stand with the people of Israel who seek nothing more than safety."

Liberal member for Caulfield David Southwick read a statement on behalf of the ALP's Marsha Thomson and himself, co-chairs of the Victorian Parliamentary Friends of Israel: "We wish to express our support for the Israeli people, whose only wish is to live in peace with secure and safe borders ... While we are conducting this rally in peace, we see many Palestinian students ... having rallies that do nothing to support peace."

ZCV president Sam Tataraka spoke about the deaths last week of three Israelis sheltering from rocket attacks in an apartment in Kiryat Malachi. "One of them [Mira Scharf, 25], almost unbelievably, was the wife of the shaliach of Chabad who had taken the place of the couple who were murdered in Mumbai four years ago at the hands of terrorists."

While Melbourne's Jewish community gathered in South Caulfield, another 1000 rallied at Bondi Mizrahi Synagogue in Sydney, where they were addressed by Zionist Council of NSW president Richard Balkin, State Labor Upper House MP Walt Secord, NSW Liberal Member for Vauchuse and the chairperson of the Parliamentary Friends of Israel Gabrielle Upton, rabbis and youth group leaders.



From left: Organisers Noey Kolt of AUJS and ACT Jewish Community president Kim Rubenstein with federal MP Dr Mike Kelly.

Code Red in Canberra

SYLVIA DEUTSCH

"It is fully in accordance with international law that Israel defend itself," Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Dr Mike Kelly told a pro-Israel rally in Canberra last Sunday, praising Israel for its attempts to avoid civilian casualties.

About 60 people attended the gathering, many dressed in red in a reference to Code Red - the 15-second alert sounded when rockets are fired at the Jewish State.

Kelly blasted Hamas as a terrorist organisation, stating it had a "disgusting, backward and medieval" charter, had perpetrated numerous human rights violations and incited a hatred of Jews in its schools.

He also accused it of trying to derail any moves towards a two-state solution and expressed hopes for an "Arab Spring" in Gaza, where Palestinians were suffering under Hamas.

"While my colleague Gabrielle Upton and I differ on many issues in the NSW Parliament, we are united today as supporters of Israel and the Jewish people," Secord said.

"We have one voice as we call on Hamas to cease those attacks immediately. No nation and its citizens should have to face such indiscriminate and unrelenting attacks."

"We are fully committed to a two-state future for the Palestinian people, but firing rockets into Israel is not the way to that place," he said. "We need to send a message to Hamas to stop, and to accept the right of Israel to exist."

Israeli Ambassador Yuval Rotem told the gathering that Code Red was a new state of mind as a whole generation of Israelis now lived with the reality of the 15-second alarm system for incoming rockets, where they had to run for their lives. This was something that was difficult for people in Australia to understand, he said. Israel has exercised the utmost restraint, Rotem added. "The problem is not us. It is very simple: stop firing the rockets."

He expressed his appreciation of the rallies in support of Israel. "It is important for the people of Israel to know that people in Australia are supporting and standing with Israel at this moment," he said.

