

Israel and Canada

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Throughout the Middle East and Arab world, people are rising up against dictatorship and tyranny. They are fighting for their human rights and their human dignity, even while under the threat of violence and death.

Amidst this violence, however, Israel remains relatively calm and peaceful. One of the reasons for this is that many of the freedoms that the people of the Middle East and Arab world are fighting for already exist in Israel. The right to vote, the right to disagree with the government and protection of freedom of the press are just some of the fundamental rights that have existed in Israel since its founding.

One of the things I admire the most about Israel is that they have maintained a free and democratic society even while being surrounded by dictatorships.

Having suffered firsthand the tragic consequences of hatred and tyranny, the Jewish people created a nation built on the foundation of justice and human dignity. Upon this foundation, they built a modern, prosperous and free society. This nation embraces people of all backgrounds and all faiths, as we do in Canada.

I first learned about Israel when I had the honour of being a part of The Asper Foundation Human Rights and Holocaust Studies Program. I attended a four month program, where students learned about the Holocaust, Israel, and human rights violations around the world. We had the opportunity to hear from Holocaust survivors about their experiences, and I was amazed by the fact that they retained so much hope for the human race, despite seeing the lowest depths of hatred, aggression, and oppression. I was struck by how important it was to them that Israel exists, and how deeply they felt attached to Israel. For them, Israel is not just a country; it is something they carry in their hearts. At the same time, they were deeply grateful for Canada, and they recognized that all of us who live in free countries are truly blessed.

Here on our campus, discussions about Israel can sometimes become quite heated. Good people can be on different sides of this issue. However, if we can channel this passion and emotion towards a search for the truth and for common ground, I believe that people of all backgrounds and all viewpoints will find that there is much to admire and support when it comes to the state of Israel. There is no country on our Earth that is perfect, and Israel is no exception. However, Israel need not be perfect for us to admire what it has achieved.

Many students that I know support Israel because we recognize that their values are our values. These values of democracy, respect for individual freedom, and a willingness to hear all points of view, are essential and fundamental to our way of life. They are the values that we cherish and believe in, and they are the values that our world needs now more than ever.

Spencer Fernando is the Comment Editor for the Manitoban