

Member	Rachel Westaway	Electorate	Prahran
Period	1 April 2025 to 30 June 2025		

Regulation 6 - Expense allowance and electorate allowance	
Total amount paid to member for electorate allowance	\$12,514.74
Total amount paid to member for expense allowance	\$0.00

Regulation 7 - Motor vehicle allowance	
Total amount paid to member for motor vehicle allowance	\$9,204.90
Member did not receive the motor vehicle allowance in the previous quarter and member has elected to receive the motor vehicle allowance for this quarter	No

Regulation 9 - Parliamentary accommodation sitting allowance	
Total amount paid to member for parliamentary accommodation sitting allowance	\$0.00
Suburb in which the member's parliamentary accommodation is located	n/a

Regulation 10 - Travel allowance claims					
Date from	Date until	Reason for travel	Total amount paid	Town or city in which accommodation was located	Value of the accommodation

Total number of nights for travel allowance claims 0

Total amount paid to member for travel allowance \$0.00

Regulation 11 - Commercial transport allowance claims					
Date from	Date until	Reason for travel	Total amount paid	Mode of transport	Value of transport

Total number of nights for commercial transport allowance claims 0

Total amount paid to member for commercial transport allowance \$0.00

Regulation 12 - International travel allowance claims			
Date from	Date until	Reason for travel	Total amount paid
20/04/2025	2/05/2025	Electorate Business - Flights to Poland and Israel for study tour plus accommodation and incidentals	\$9,245.55

Total number of nights for international travel allowance claims 12

Total amount paid to member for international travel allowance \$9,245.55

2025 MP Delegation – Poland and Israel

Submitted by:

Rachel Westaway MP

Member for Prahran

Introduction

This report covers the travel of a delegation of Victorian Labor and Liberal and National MPs to Poland and Israel.

Travel occurred between 21 April and 2 May 2025.

The delegation members for the Poland Component were:

- David Southwick MP
- James Newbury MP, Member for Brighton
- Rachel Westaway MP, Member for Prahran
- Tim Bull MP, Member for Gippsland East
- Emma Kealy MP, Member for Lowan
- Paul Hamer MP, Member for Box Hill
- Nina Taylor MP, Member for Albert Park
- Michael Galea MP, Member for the South Eastern Metropolitan Region
- Ryan Batchelor MP, Member for the Southern Metropolitan Region

The delegation members for the Israel Component were:

- David Southwick MP
- James Newbury MP, Member for Brighton
- Rachel Westaway MP, Member for Prahran
- Tim Bull MP, Member for Gippsland East
- Emma Kealy MP, Member for Lowan

The purpose of the travel was for electorate business. It was undertaken in my capacity as the Member for Prahran. Prahran includes the suburbs of South Yarra, Prahran and Windsor, as well as parts of Southbank, St Kilda and St Kilda East. South Yarra, Prahran and St Kilda East are in the top 50 largest Jewish population centres by suburb in Australia according to 2021 ABS data. Given the significant issues pertaining to antisemitism and the recent firebombing of the synagogue in the neighbouring electorate as well as the recent antisemitic graffiti at the Toorak Schule in the seat of Prahran, the trip provided an opportunity to understand the broader issues relating to historic antisemitism in the context of current issues occurring globally.

Accommodation and Commercial Transport Expenses

Claim Reason	\$AUD	Other Currency	Date
Accommodation – Tel Aviv, Israel	\$3,419.08 AUD	\$2,194.00 USD	08/05/2025
Accommodation – Warsaw, Poland	\$1,400.00 AUD	N/A	16/04/2025
Accommodation – Dubai, UAE (Departure)	\$570.00 AUD	N/A	17/04/2025
Accommodation – Dubai, UAE (Return)	\$95.88 AUD	\$225.00 AED	01/05/2025
Flights – MEL-DBX-TLV-WAW-TLV-DXB-MEL	\$4,326.44 AUD	N/A	09/04/2025
Transport – Taxi -Dubai, UAE	\$19.25 AUD	\$45.00 AED	21/04/2025

Total \$9,830.65

Poland and Israel – Purpose of Visit

Summary

In April 2025, a cross-party delegation of nine MPs visited Poland as part of the 80th Anniversary of the end of the Holocaust. The nine MPs were Ryan Batchelor MP, Tim Bull MP, Michael Galea MP, Paul Hamer MP, Emma Kealy MP, James Newbury MP, David Southwick MP, Nina Taylor MP, and Rachel Westaway MP. The program was organised by *March of the Living* Australia – a non-for-profit organisation that has been established to educate Jewish and non-Jewish Australians about Jewish life in Poland in the centuries before the Holocaust, the circumstances that led up to the Holocaust and the impact that it had – particularly on Polish Jewry. It does this through an immersive, in-country, experience for participants. Our tour was led by Sue Hampel OAM, Co-President of the Melbourne Holocaust Museum.

While attending the anniversary commemoration was significant in its own right – given that it was the 80th anniversary, and therefore one of the last milestone anniversaries in which Holocaust survivors would be able to participate in the program – the program had particular significance this year given the rise in Anti-Semitism that has been witnessed in Victoria (and elsewhere in the world) over the last 18 months. Given that Victoria is home to the largest Holocaust survivor community outside of Israel, this is an issue that touches communities throughout the State and serves as a reminder of how important it is for community leaders of all political persuasions to stand up and speak out against racism and bigotry, as well as how quickly words of hate can turn into something far more devastating. The program has given members of the delegation the insights to speak to their own communities, and the Victorian community at large, about the dangers of letting antisemitism, and other forms of racism, go unchecked.

Although Australian politicians have previously visited Auschwitz, including on International Holocaust Remembrance Day in January, this was the first delegation of MPs from an Australian Parliament to participate in the *March of the Living* program.

Following the visit to Poland five MPs continued onto Israel to join in the global celebration of Yom Ha'atzmaut (Israel's Independence Day). This transition underscores the stark contrast between remembrance and renewal, that is; the memory of tragedy and the celebration of resilience. The five MPs were Emma Kealy MP, Tim Bull MP, James Newbury MP, Rachel Westaway MP and David Southwick MP.

The Israel segment of the trip was hosted by the Australia Israel & Jewish Affairs Council (AIJAC), whose program offered insight into the complex issues facing Israel today, including those with direct relevance to Australia, such as the rise of extremism and challenges to social cohesion. These topics are particularly pertinent in the context of Victoria's diverse and multicultural society.

Overall, the visit to Poland and Israel offered a powerful educational and emotional journey, deepening our understanding of Jewish history, identity, and continuity. It also provided

valuable perspective on broader geopolitical and social dynamics relevant to both Israel and Australia.

Melbourne is home to one of the highest per capita populations of Holocaust survivors outside of Israel.

Statement of Objectives

- Participate in the March of the Living program in Poland to deepen understanding of Jewish history, pre-war European Jewish life, and the Holocaust.
- Commemorate Yom HaShoah at historical Holocaust sites and reflect on the legacy of genocide, antisemitism, and the importance of remembrance.
- Mark Yom Ha'atzmaut in Israel to witness the resilience and renewal of Jewish nationhood in the aftermath of historic tragedy.
- Visit Israel in the aftermath of the October 7 massacre to learn about the event, the subsequent conflict, and its humanitarian, social, and geopolitical impacts on Israelis, Palestinians, and the global community.
- Gain insight into the political, social, and economic composition of the modern State of Israel, with particular attention to its democratic institutions, security environment, and civil society.
- Engage with Israel's cultural and religious diversity to broaden understanding of its people and the varied communities that make up its population.
- Explore the complex dynamics of the Middle East and their influence on social cohesion, intercommunal relations, and public discourse within Victoria.
- Build relationships with key government and community stakeholders in both Poland and Israel that may offer mutual benefits for Victoria, including in education, innovation, multicultural policy, and social resilience.
- Identify and investigate relevant Israeli programs and policy initiatives that may inform Victorian policy development, particularly in areas such as integration, security, and social cohesion.

Recommendations

Following this trip, this delegation calls on the Victorian Government to:

- Support Holocaust and antisemitism education by strengthening curriculum content in schools and funding community-based education initiatives, including partnerships with organisations like March of the Living.
- Promote social cohesion and resilience by increasing support for interfaith and intercultural dialogue programs, particularly in response to global conflicts that impact local communities.

- Establish formal knowledge-sharing partnerships with Israeli institutions on innovation, counter-extremism, and multicultural policy development.

Hosts

Poland - March of the Living Australia (MOTL)

March of the Living Australia Inc. is a values-based, community-orientated, for-purpose NFP organisation and prides itself on best-practice governance in line with its core values of respect, inclusiveness, tolerance and social justice.

The March of the Living itself, a 3-kilometre walk from Auschwitz 1 to Birkenau, is a tribute to all victims of the Holocaust, their memories and their legacies. The March contrasts with the death marches, which began towards the end of World War II and continued virtually until the Third Reich's last days.

The uniqueness of the program is highlighted by the distinctive experience of visiting Poland over Yom HaShoah, followed by a special visit to Israel over Yom HaZikaron and Yom Ha'atzmaut.

MOTL assisted by facilitating the visit to historical and significant sites and providing transportation, accommodation and meals.

Israel - Australian/Israel Jewish Affairs Council (AIJAC)

AIJAC is the premier public affairs organisation for the Australian Jewish Community. AIJAC represents the Australian Jewish Community to the Australian Government, politicians, media and other community groups and organisations.

This program annually organizes programs for senior journalists, politicians, political advisors and senior public servants to visit Israel. AIJAC actively engages government on many world political issues such as anti-Israel bias and Islamic extremism.

AIJAC assisted in organising high level meetings with Government, Industry and Community Organisations. In addition, they assisted with transportation and some meals.

Please find attached the itinerary for the visits attached.

Poland DAY 1 - Tuesday 22nd April 2025 - Krakow

Krakow was the historic capital of Poland and the residence of Polish royalty. Following the Nazi invasion of Poland in 1939, Krakow was established as the capital of the General Government, a Nazi-occupied administrative region. The Nazi Governor-General, Hans Frank, took up residence in the city's historic Wawel castle. As a result of this history, many of Krakow's historic buildings remain, including a large old city.

Introduction to Krakow - Walking Tour

The delegation took a walk along King's Way, which stretches through the city of Krakow, to Wawel Castle. Today, the walk remains a central avenue for the city, that includes a number of key buildings, squares, and shopping districts. Notably, parts of the walk still include original medieval fortification. After crossing over the originally placed drawbridge, the walk commences with Floriańska Gate, which was erected shortly after 1300. The gate originally was the starting point for royal processions. Beyond the gate, a bustling strip is now in place, before the street opens into main market square, known as Rynek. The square is one of the largest market squares in Europe.

During World War Two, the Nazis used the square for a rally that was attended by Adolf Hitler. The square includes a number of prominent features, including the Town Hall Tower, a seventy-metre tower, Cloth Hall, which is a bustling market, St. Mary's Basilica, and the thousand-year-old Church of St. Adalbert. After leaving the square, the royal route continues, until it reaches Wawel Castle. The Castle was built under order of King Casimir III the Great and comprises a number of buildings including the Wawel Cathedral. Many visit the castle because of the myth surrounding Smok the dragon who lived under the castle. Today a large fire breathing statue is a heavily visited tourist attraction.

Jewish Krakow

The first recorded presence of Jews residing in Krakow dates from the early 13th century. In the late 1400s, the Jews of Krakow were forced to move outside the old city, with many settling in the neighbouring village of Kazimierz. For the next 450 years, Kazimierz would be the city's Jewish quarter and a major centre for Jewish life. On the eve of the war approximately 60,000 Jews resided in Krakow, almost one-quarter of a total population of about 250,000.

While today the Jewish community of Krakow is small, the history of Kazimierz is kept alive through an annual festival of Jewish culture, which has become one of the world's largest Jewish festivals. In the heart of Kazimierz is the childhood home of Helena Rubinstein (now the Rubinstein Hotel). As a young adult, Rubinstein moved to Coleraine (in the Lowan electorate) where she would establish an international cosmetics business.

On its visit to Kazimierz, the delegation visited three of the five synagogues remaining in the city:

Remuh Synagogue (Orthodox) – The oldest synagogue in Poland and one of the oldest in Europe. The present buildings were built to honour plague victims following a severe outbreak of plague in 1551. Many of the tombstones in the adjacent cemetery were pillaged by the Germans and used as road bases and building foundations. Surviving fragments were used by the synagogue after the war to construct a moving exterior wall, where you can still see many of the inscriptions on the tombstones today.

Tempel Synagogue (Reform) - Built in the 1860s. It is the newest synagogue in the city, and was noted for pre-war preacher Rabbi Ozjasz Thon, who typically (and unusually) gave his sermons in Polish, not in Hebrew. This approach attracted congregants who favoured Jewish assimilation with Poles, however rising antisemitism in the pre-war period started to drive its members away towards Zionism, which was building strong support amongst Galician Jews. The synagogue would be used by the occupiers as horse stabling during the war.

Izaak Synagogue (Orthodox) – Currently being restored, this synagogue was used by the occupying Germans as paper storage. During the war, the Gestapo ordered the Jewish official on duty to burn the Torahs. He refused and was shot. The building was a high school campus until a few years ago.

Jewish Community Centre Kraków

In 2008, the Jewish Community Centre (JCC) of Krakow was formed, with the centre formally opened by Prince Charles (now King Charles III). It aims to rebuild and support Jewish life in Krakow. The JCC is 95% funded by foreign donations and holds a close connection to Australia as previous Australian *March of the Living* delegations were the first to visit the centre.

With 1,100 active members, the centre's reach remains strong as too is their social contribution. Last year, 100,000 people visited the centre. For example, as the group visited, we met with displaced Ukrainians who fled from the Russian invasion and are fed each day by the centre. The centre provides between 800-1000 meals a week and has provided support to 400,000 Ukrainian refugees, 98% of whom aren't Jewish (A total of 7 million Ukrainians have passed through Poland since the full-scale invasion commenced in 2022). In that time, the JCC has invested approximately \$14 million USD in aid, roughly \$2,000 USD per day. The delegation also crossed paths with Bernard, a Holocaust survivor who comes in every day to make use of the centre's food pantry.

At the centre, the delegation met with its director, Johnathan Ornstein. Johnathan noted that Poland has not seen a rise in antisemitism, as many other nations have. He reported that Jews feel very safe in the country today. As with many in Poland, he reports that the main concern is the threat of Russia, noting that US posturing regarding NATO has also undermined confidence.

Galicia Jewish Museum

In the afternoon, the delegation visited the Galicia Jewish Museum. The museum opened in 2004 with investment from the UK. Galicia is a historic region of south-eastern Poland and western Ukraine that was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire prior to World War One.

The delegation was shown the exhibits by curator Dr Katarzyna (Kasia) Suszkiewicz. The main exhibition shows images of Jewish life in Kraków and wider Galicia before the war, the horrors of the Holocaust, and how Jewish life has since revived in the region. The photos in the final section are the only to show people in them, a poignant symbol of Jewish culture coming back to life in the region.

The Galicia Jewish Museum has also played a major role supporting Ukrainian refugees. At the start of the war the museum was used as a daycare centre, with Ukrainian speaking teachers supporting the children whilst their mothers were arranging their affairs. It was also used as a job finding service for adults, with one senior gallery official from Ukraine now working at the museum itself. More recently the museum has been used as a support service for senior Ukrainian refugees.

There is discussion about a forthcoming exhibition the museum will put on about Australia and the Holocaust, focusing on survivors' stories in Australia. There will be an opportunity for this exhibition to tour Sydney and Melbourne at some point.

Kraków Ghetto (Podgórze)

Following the museum, the delegation crossed the Vistula River to the suburb of Podgórze – historically a poor suburb, home to light industry. It was in Podgórze that the Nazis established the Krakow ghetto, forcing 15,000 Jews to live in extremely cramped conditions. A *Judenrat* (or Jewish Council) was established under the strict control of the occupying Nazi forces.

A year after the ghetto was set up, more than half of the population were seized off the streets and taken by train to the Belżec death camp. The entire ghetto would be liquidated in March 1943.

The delegation visited three significant sites within the ghetto precinct:

Eagle Pharmacy (Apteka Pod Orłem)

The central square has a monument of 68 chairs. Most are facing the famous Eagle Pharmacy, which during the war was run by Tadeusz Pankiewicz. The pharmacist would provide support the population in various ways which helped them to survive. Open 24/7, the pharmacy was the secret meeting place of the underground, and a contact point where food and medications were delivered to the people living in the ghetto. He would supply hair dye to Jewish girls so they could pass as blonde Poles and offer medicine to put people to calm those who couldn't cope with their situation.

In 1983, Tadeusz Pankiewicz was recognised as "Righteous Among the Nations" by Yad Vashem on for rescuing countless Jews from the Holocaust. The pharmacy is now preserved as a museum.

Schindler's factory

On the outskirts of the ghetto, the delegation visited the factory Oskar Schindler moved his business to during the war. Whilst he profited off slave labour and has a flawed and complicated story, his efforts in rescuing 1,200 Jews from their fate in the ghettos by relocating them to safety have set his legacy. His story was relatively obscure until Australian author Thomas Keneally immortalised him in *Schindler's Ark*, which was adapted into the film *Schindler's List*.

On the side with the factory there is a plaque (in Polish) commemorating amongst two others, John P Liversidge, an Australian RAAF pilot who has a connection with East Gippsland. They were part of an aerial bombing unit who supported the Warsaw Uprising in 1944.

The inside of the factory has a wall with a small portrait of each of the people who Schindler saved – including a number who later migrated to Melbourne.

Ghetto wall

There are two remaining sections of the ghetto wall in Kraków, of which the delegation visited one. The wall was deliberately topped in the shape of tombstones as macabre symbolism by the Nazis. The buildings abutting the walls had their windows bricked up, so inhabitants could not see or interact with the outside world.

Dinner with Professor Mark Spiegelman and Rachel Spiegelman

Professor Spiegelman is an accomplished Australian who is a retired surgeon and archaeologist. Born in Poland in 1940, he is a survivor of the Holocaust. He told us of his many remarkable survival stories from his childhood, including how his parents dressed him as a girl to avoid German officers checking to see if he was circumcised, and how he and his mother narrowly escaped detection and capture whilst on a trip to the market to buy essential food.

He also shared with us the harrowing conditions he lived in concealed in the ground in the ghetto. He was forced to live underground for an extended period, as a result of which he and only a small number of others avoided capture during the ghetto's liquidation.

Professor Spiegelman was in Poland as part of the *March of the Living Australia* delegation.

Poland Day 3 Thursday 24 April 2025 – Auschwitz/Birkenau (Overnight in Warsaw)

In 2025, the Jewish Holocaust Remembrance Day (Yom HaShoah) fell on 24 April. It coincides with the date in the Hebrew calendar that marks the beginning of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of 1943, when Jewish resistance fighters defied the Nazis and fought for freedom and dignity.

Auschwitz

In the morning, the delegation was given a tour of the Auschwitz camp complex:

Crematorium – Near the entrance to the camp, a rudimentary gas chamber and crematorium was built. Victims were transported in cattle trucks, and then those selected for death had to experience the indignity of having to undress publicly ahead of being led to extermination by poisonous gas and their bodies cremated. The gas chamber and crematorium used in Auschwitz served as a prototype for the mass extermination that occurred at Birkenau.

Site of hanging of Rudolf Höss– Rudolf Höss, a German SS officer and the commandant of the Auschwitz concentration camp, lived adjacent to the camp very comfortably with his family, simultaneous to his leadership of the camp (the home is visible from inside the camp). After the defeat of Nazi Germany and the end of World War II, he was convicted in Poland and executed for war crimes on the Auschwitz camp site.

Exploration of Buildings – Former camp barracks have been converted into a museum, with each providing physical evidence of how prisoners lived, ahead of extermination, save for the few who managed to escape and/or survived following liberation. Exhibits include:

- Individual, itemised photos of early prisoners (this was only undertaken in the early phases of the camp), as well as other photographic evidence, some taken without authority, to provide important evidence of the inhumane treatment. For instance, photos of sites of murders committed and mass graves ahead of Auschwitz being implemented e.g. in countries such as Lithuania, Belarus, Romania & more.
- Huge quantities of human hair extracted from victims – extremely disturbing.
- Large quantities of items formally owned by victims of the camp: clothing, suitcases, disability-aids, toiletry items (shaving brushes, hair combs), shoes etc
- Details regarding the completely unethical experimentation conducted on children, especially twins.
- Examples of the completely inadequate rations provided to prisoners, noting that starvation (and torture) was a pivotal and frequent cause of death in the camp.

March of the Living

Each year since 1988, Jews and non-Jews from across the world have come together on Yom HaShoah to participate in the March of the Living – a 3 km walk from the concentration camp at Auschwitz to the extermination camp at Birkenau (or Auschwitz II)

Approximately 12,000 people from 40 countries participated in the march **President Isaac Herzog of Israel** and **Polish President Andrzej Duda** opened the march, greeting the participating Holocaust survivors and released hostage Eli Sharabi, who was representing an Israeli delegation of released hostages and hostages' family members. The delegation marched together with other Australians (including Professor Spiegelman and his family).

As we reached Birkenau, out of respect for the millions of people killed, many from our group (and others) placed wooden paddles between the rails of the train tracks that led to this place of extermination.

Yom HaShoah ceremony

The walk culminated with a ceremony on the grounds of Birkenau to commemorate the 80th Anniversary of the end of World War II and the liberation of the concentration camps in Nazi-occupied Europe. Owing to a huge storm with torrential rain and hail, the ceremony concluded earlier than originally planned.

Poland Day 4 Friday 25 April 2025 - Warsaw

Warsaw is the capital and largest city in Poland. It was almost completely destroyed during World War II. The delegation spent the day in Warsaw learning about Jewish life in the city, and the experiences of the Warsaw Ghetto.

ANZAC Ceremony Warsaw

The delegation observed ANZAC Day in Poland and was pleased to be the guests of the **Australian Ambassador Benjamin Hayes** at the combined Australia – New Zealand service at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Piłsudski Square. This event was also attended by both the New Zealand and Israeli Ambassadors to Poland and a representative of the Turkish Embassy in Warsaw.

One of the more pleasing elements of this service was the level of participation from the Polish Defence Forces, a country that has no direct history of entering combat alongside troops from other countries and had no representation at Gallipoli, which the date commemorates. Representatives of the Polish Land Forces, Air Force and Special Forces formed the official guard at the service and impressed all in attendance.

Our delegation was well received and laid a wreath on behalf of Victoria, later attending an official reception at the Australian Embassy.

Warsaw Ghetto

The delegation undertook a walking tour of Warsaw to learn more about the Warsaw Ghetto, and the fate of the city's Jewish population following the Nazi invasion in 1939.

The Warsaw Ghetto was the largest of the Nazi ghettos, established in November 1940 and imprisoning around 460,000 Jews in an area of 3.4 square kilometres. This represented about 30% of the population of the city confined to around 2.4% of the metropolitan area. Conditions were extremely poor, with few rations and severe overcrowding. Disease was rampant. Communal prayer was banned. Around 100,000 inhabitants died in the ghetto from disease and starvation before the deportation to the death camps began in 1942.

The tour included a visit to the Monument to Henryk Goldszmit, a Polish Jewish pediatrician and children's author. He was also an early children's rights advocate, in 1919 drafting a children's constitution, and hosting a radio program during the 1930s promoting the rights of children. Goldszmit operated an orphanage in Warsaw, which was forcibly moved to the ghetto under Nazi occupation. Despite offers of sanctuary by underground organisations in the ghetto, Goldszmit would not leave the nearly 200 children in his care. All of the inhabitants of the orphanage were sent to the Treblinka extermination camp and murdered in 1942.

Resistance in the ghetto to German incarceration grew, and underground organisations and movements formed including ŻOB, the Jewish Combat Organisation. The delegation visited the Anielewicz Bunker, at Miła 18, a ŻOB command bunker that includes a memorial to the Warsaw Uprising and the resistance fighters who died. The Warsaw Uprising in May 1943 was an act of resistance in the ghetto to oppose the Nazi's final efforts to transport the remaining ghetto population to the death camps in 1943. Armed

resistance began in early May, and continued for 29 days. At Miła 18, when their command bunker was discovered, the ŻOB leadership committed mass suicide via poison rather than be captured by the Nazis. Around 13,000 Jews were killed in the ghetto uprising. Once the uprising was defeated, the remaining residents of the ghetto were deported to the death camps.

Several hundred bunkers were built throughout the Warsaw Ghetto during occupation, for protection and to aid the armed resistance. The delegation visited an archaeological site curated by the Warsaw Ghetto Museum. A park near the Anielewicz Bunker was chosen in 2022 for archaeological research, and excavation work later that year discovered basements from two nineteenth century tenement houses that formed part of the Warsaw Ghetto. The sites uncovered an extensive collection of fragments of equipment and infrastructure used as part of the resistance in the ghetto. The delegation heard from museum staff about the historical significance of the find and the plans to preserve both the site and the remnant artefacts.

POLIN museum

On Friday afternoon the delegation visited the POLIN Museum in Warsaw. The POLIN museum in Warsaw is a Museum of the History of Polish Jews. Its core exhibition covers the 1000-year history of Jews in Poland, from the Middle Ages to the present. Prior to the Second World War, Poland was home to one of the largest Jewish communities in the world, estimated to be around 3.3 million before the Holocaust.

In addition to a museum of history, the POLIN Museum's mission is to "be a place of meetings and discussions for all those who want to better understand the past and contemporary Jewish culture, draw lessons for the future, confront stereotypes, and face today's threats such as xenophobia and prejudice. Our values are openness, tolerance, and truth. In our activities, we strive for a mutual understanding and respect between Poles and Jews. We aim to serve as a guide on the path to building a multicultural community."

Polin is the Hebrew word for Poland, and sounds like 'rest here' which legend tells was told to Jews fleeing persecution in the East. This began a millennia of settlement in the lands of modern Poland. The museum explores the role of Jewish traders and merchants, and the charters that gave Jews the right to settle, practice their religion, engage in certain occupations, and be protected from harm.

The museum traces the long history of the Jewish community in Poland – from its periods of relative stability and prosperity through to times of anti-Semitic violence and State sanctioned restrictions. The museum also documents how the prevailing conditions, particularly in the late 19th century and early 20th century gave rise to the establishment to a range of Jewish political organisations.

In addition to documenting the experience of Polish Jews during the Holocaust (90% of whom were murdered), the museum also has a focus on the fate of the some 300,000 Polish Jews who survived the war, most of them in the Soviet Union. The vast majority left within a few years. For those who remained, so did antisemitism.

This became heightened in 1968 as part of the socio-political crisis and student protest and uprisings against the communist regime. In an effort to discredit student protests, the communist government launched a propaganda war that blamed Jews. While not expressly using the word 'Jew', instead these anti-

semitic campaigns included the organisation of “anti-Zionist” rallies in towns and cities. In the wake of this campaign, around 13,000 Jews left Poland.

The fall of communism in 1989 has begun a revival of Jewish life, albeit on a small scale. While the number of Jews in Poland today is small, there has been a renewal of Jewish life and a celebration of Polish Jewish traditions, history and culture.

Shabbat service and dinner

In the evening, members of the delegation who were not travelling on to Tel Aviv attended a Friday night shabbat service at the Nożyk Synagogue in Warsaw. Originally constructed in 1898, the Nożyk Synagogue is the only surviving prewar Jewish house of prayer in Warsaw and is recognised as a symbol of survival for the Polish Jews.

The synagogue was used by Warsaw’s significant Jewish community until the mid-war period, when it was requisitioned and repurposed by the invading Nazis. Following extensive restoration in the post-war years, and after the fall of the Communist regime, the synagogue remains an active Orthodox Jewish house of prayer. The Nożyk Synagogue was the subject of an arson attack in November 2024.

The service included the choir from the Israeli Defence Force, and the synagogue was full of congregants and visitors from all over the globe, joining together for prayer, contemplation and reflection on what had been a momentous week of activities.

Following the shabbat service, members of the delegation returned to have a Shabbat dinner with members of the *March of the Living* Australian delegation, and used the opportunity to reflect on the Poland based activities, and in particular the visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau and the March of the Living, and how to communicate the impact of these experiences to other colleagues and members of the broader community upon our return to Australia.

Israel Day 1 - 26 April 2025

Visit to Jerusalem War Cemetery

What many Israeli and Australian citizens overlook is the ANZAC effort to liberate Israel during WWI when the troops fought with the Allied forces from Egypt, up through what is now Israel, Lebanon and Syria, ending 400 years of Ottoman rule and paving the way for the establishment of a Jewish State. As is the case in every conflict, men from our country fell throughout this area.

The Jerusalem War Cemetery contains the bodies of 20 Victorians and ironically each of the members of the delegation had at least one soldier from their electorate at this cemetery.

Those visited were:

Henry James Roberts, of Heyfield/Traralgon, 8th Mobile veterinary section, aged 23, grave W.73. Died of disease (dysentery, pyrexia, malaria) August 20, 1918, at 66th casualty clearing station – from electorate of Tim Bull.

Garnet Gaylor, of Albert Park / Elwood, 8th Light Horse Regiment, aged 31, grave H.99. Died of bullet wound to skull, May 4, 1918, admitted unconscious and never recovered – from electorate of James Newbury.

Richard Gould, of Warracknabeal, Imperial Camel Corps, aged 25, grave H.3. Died of gunshot wounds to shoulder and neck in Jordan Valley, April 2, 1918 – from electorate of Emma Kealy.

John Jamieson, of St Kilda/Ascot Vale, 3rd Light Horse Field Amb., aged 28, grave H.19. Killed in action May 21, 1918, originally buried Mussellabeh then reinterred – from electorate of James Newbury.

Andrew Loudon, of Ballarat/St Kilda East/Elwood, Imperial Camel Corps, aged 23, grave H.58. Killed in action April 11, 1918, originally buried Mussellabeh and reinterred – from electorates of both David Southwick and James Newbury.

Cecil Mumby, of Brighton, 10th Light Horse Regiment, aged 38, grave W.80. Died June 27, 1918 result of accident (fractured skull) in Jerusalem, knocked down by a motor car, driver not identified, died in casualty clearing station 66 – from electorate of James Newbury.

Michael Powell, of Warracknabeal/Brunswick, 4th Light Horse Regiment, aged 22, grave H.38. Died of wounds, July 19, 1918 (gunshot wound to head and abdomen) sustained on Jordan Valley, near Jericho – from electorate of Emma Kealy.

Joseph Streefkerk, of Richmond/South Yarra/Camberwell, Imperial Camel Corps, aged 21, grave H.94. Killed in action April 11, 1918, originally buried Mussellabeh before being reinterred – from electorate of Rachel Westaway.

Jerusalem Old City

The Old City is divided into four quarters: the Muslim Quarter, the Christian Quarter, the Armenian Quarter, and the Jewish Quarter where many people still reside and our observations suggest that generally people live harmoniously in the Old City.

It is of sacred significance to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam because it houses key religious sites, including the Temple Mount (Western Wall for Judaism), the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (for Christians), and the Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa Mosque (for Muslims) which makes it a spiritual centre for these three major Abrahamic religions.

It is considered the holiest site in the world for Jews. Above the Western Wall stands the Dome of the Rock, which is important for Muslims who believe the prophet Muhammad rose to heaven. Also situated close by is the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

This visit demonstrated the significance of the city to many religions and also demonstrated that those of different faiths reside side by side.

Jonathan Spyer

The group met with Jonathan Spyer, a British-Israeli analyst, writer, and journalist. The meeting provided the group with an opportunity to discuss in depth the geopolitical situation that Israel faces. The discussion covered historical context, current day issues and his views of the future. His insights into the positioning of regional actors and his assessment of their strategic decision making was particularly insightful.

Israel Day 2 - 27 April 2025

The Car Wall Memorial, Tkuma, Israel

The Car Wall Memorial near Moshav Tkuma in the southern Negev region stands as a poignant testament to the tragic events of October 7, 2023, when Hamas militants launched a coordinated attack on Israeli communities near the Gaza border, resulting in the deaths of over 1,100 individuals, including 779 civilians.

The memorial comprises approximately 1,560 vehicles - cars, vans, ambulances, and motorcycles - that were destroyed during the attacks. Many of these vehicles belonged to attendees of the Nova music festival and residents attempting to flee the violence. The vehicles, many riddled with bullet holes or burned beyond recognition, are arranged in towering stacks along the perimeter of a former wheat field, creating a stark visual representation of the day's horrors.

Each vehicle tells a story. Some are marked with barcodes that, when scanned, reveal the narratives of the individuals who once occupied them. For instance, one car belonged to Ben Binyamin Shimoni, who courageously made multiple trips to rescue festival goers before being killed alongside his passengers.

The Hamas terrorist's vehicles with well-engineered mountings for weaponry are a chilling reminder of the planning and intent behind the October 7 attacks.

The Tkuma Car Wall Memorial serves as a powerful reminder of the atrocities committed, the scale of the October 7 attacks and the resilience of the Israeli people.

Visit to Kibbutz Be-eri

On October 7, 2023, Kibbutz Be'eri, located near the Gaza Strip in southern Israel, was the site of one of the most devastating attacks during the Hamas-led incursion into Israel.

To visit the site and be escorted around the precinct by resident Danny was an experience one can never forget.

Around 70 Hamas militants infiltrated the kibbutz early that morning, initiating a brutal assault that resulted in the deaths of around 130 people, including women, children and infants - about 10% of the community's population.

In addition, dozens of homes were destroyed, and numerous residents were taken hostage or abducted to Gaza.

We were told the attack began shortly after 6.30am, with terrorists breaching the kibbutz's perimeter and proceeding house to house, killing or kidnapping residents. Some homes were set ablaze, and entire families were massacred.

The kibbutz's small security team attempted to repel the attackers but was quickly overwhelmed. An Israeli special forces unit arrived approximately 90 minutes after the assault began but had to retreat due to casualties. It then took about seven hours before substantial IDF forces intervened. This response delay has caused significant angst in the local community.

The Israeli military later acknowledged failures in intelligence and preparedness, admitting that they did not adequately protect Kibbutz Be'eri during the attack.

In the aftermath, the community of Be'eri has been grappling with profound trauma and loss.

Survivors recounted harrowing experiences, including hiding in darkness for hours and witnessing the deaths of loved ones. The kibbutz, once known for its vibrant community life, now stands as a symbol of the horrors of that day and the resilience of its people as they work towards rebuilding their lives.

Nova

We attended the site of the open-air Nova music – a site not dissimilar to the many music festivals young Australians attend. It was off a highway, isolated and surrounded by eucalyptus trees.

We met a young man, Shalev in his early 20s who had recently returned from a working holiday in Australia. Shalev had resided in Caulfield and worked for Uber Eats delivering food up and down Chapel Street.

Shalev provided a detailed account of the random land and air attack by Hamas on young people at the festival. Numerous other sites were also attacked, and 378 individuals (344 civilians and 34 security personnel) were killed and many more wounded. 44 people were taken hostage.

Shalev outlined how he and his friends escaped and were hidden by a Bedouin farmer, Yunis. Yunis also provided a detailed briefing of what he saw and his interactions with Hamas militants who came

to his farm that had 24 Thai nationals also working there. The Jewish attendees from the festival, the Thai Buddhist workers and the Muslim Farmer managed to escape harm.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs - 47-minute video of October 7, 2023; Briefing on gender-based violence

The Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in collaboration with the Israel Defence Forces (IDF), have produced a 47-minute documentary titled *Bearing Witness to the October 7th Massacre*. This film compiles graphic footage from the Hamas-led attacks on southern Israel on October 7, 2023, including material sourced from militants' body cameras, mobile devices, security cameras, and first responders. The content depicts extreme violence, including killings, mutilations, and other atrocities committed against civilians.

Due to its distressing nature, the film has not been released to the general public. Instead, it has been shown in controlled, private screenings to international journalists, diplomats, policymakers, and community leaders across more than 30 countries.

The delegation viewed this footage, and all delegates were significantly impacted. It was deeply disturbing to view firsthand evidence of the atrocities committed. Some of the cars from the Tkuma Car Wall Memorial were identifiable – still being driven with the driver and passengers under active attack.

The footage from Kibbutz Be'eri was particularly disturbing given we had walked through these same homes.

The severity of the attacks and the human cost cannot be justified.

The delegation was briefed around the growing evidence that Hamas soldiers were trained to target women in grotesque criminal acts. In addition to sexual violence including evidence of rape and genital shootings, video footage was obtained at three separate locations of women's breasts being cut off. The delegation was told that instructions were found on Hamas soldiers in multiple languages including "remove your pants".

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs told the delegation that this cumulative evidence of targeted attacks on women with premediated sexual violence is the first of its kind as a tool of war.

Israel Day 3 - 28 April 2025

Temple Mount

The group attended the Temple Mount, the hill on the Old City of Jerusalem in the early hours of the morning and observed the Muslims and Jews who share the space however the sense of hostility was ever present. Security was notably high, reinforcing the significance of the place and the hostilities that have been and continue. Temple Mount is a place of significant for Jews, Christians and those of Islamic faith for thousands of years.

The site is a flat plaza surrounded by retaining walls of which the Western Wall is situated.

For Jews, the Temple Mount is the holiest site in Judaism where the First and Second Holy Temples, which were destroyed in ancient times, once stood. It has been a centre of spiritual significance for Jewish people for centuries.

The first temple was destroyed and only a portion of the Second Temple which is the Western Wall remains. It is a place of pilgrimage for Jews and women and men (segregated) can be seen to pray against the Wall.

However, according to Islamic tradition, the plaza is the location of Muhammad's ascension to heaven from Jerusalem, and served as the first "qibla", the direction Muslims turn towards when praying. Muslims also associate the site with Abraham, and other Islamic prophets.

The Al-Aqsa mosque is situated on top of the sight and is the second oldest mosque in Islam and considered "the Noble Sanctuary".

The site remains a major focal point of the Israeli Palestinian conflict.

Amotz Asa – Senior Journalist

The group met with Amotz Asa, a senior journalist, writer, and former executive editor of The Jerusalem Post. His understanding of the geopolitical issues, given that he has held such senior roles, was unparalleled. The discussion was an opportunity for an open conversation about Israeli politics and its future. The discussion also included his views on the war, the geopolitical implications, and the implications for Israel's position in the world moving forward.

Visit to Yad Vashem

While much of our time in Israel focussed on the activities of October 7 and more recent times generally, Yad Vashem (Jewish Holocaust Museum) provided an insight into not only the events of WWII, but historically as well, providing a history book of Jewish life and the rise of antisemitism. It features many harrowing stories of individuals and communities from the Holocaust, but also a huge range of artefacts from that period, survivor testimonies and multimedia exhibits.

The overall experience of this location is numbing as it is virtually impossible to be able to get your head around the magnitude and nature of the mass murders that occurred in such a short period and in such a callous manner.

The graphic nature of the exhibits and photographs is difficult to consume and process. Since its establishment in 1953, Yad Vashem has expanded to become much more than a museum and memorial, including a school for international Holocaust studies.

Among the features are:

- The Children's memorial, which is a tribute to the approximately 1.5 million Jewish children murdered during the Holocaust.
- The Hall of Names is a repository for pages of testimony submitted by survivors and families, documenting the identities of millions of victims.
- Gardens dotted with trees assigned to the Righteous Among the Nations, those who have been identified as non-Jews who risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust.

While our time there was limited to two hours, it provided an important background to what we experienced over the trip to both Poland and Israel and in many ways brought the entire journey of the Jewish people together from a historical perspective.

Briefing: Khaled Abu Toameh - Journalist

Khaled Abu Toameh is a veteran award winning journalist and television producer specialising in Palestinian affairs. Khaled is currently the Palestinian affairs correspondent of the Jerusalem Post, and he has previously served as a senior producer for the NBC.

Khaled briefed the delegation on the current status of the Palestinian Authority including preparedness, opportunity and likelihood to form an alternate government to Hamas in Gaza.

Meeting with Palestinian Officials

The group attended a short online briefing with Ibrahim Dalalsha Founder and Director of the Horizon Centre for Political Studies and Media Outreach, an Analyst who has strong contacts with key Palestinian officials and played an integral role in peace negotiations across the middle east.

In response to the reasons why Palestine were slow to acknowledge the attack, he stated that they didn't know and the situation was unclear to begin with for a few days. He said that they were not supportive of attacks on civilians and all attacks on civilians were wrong. The group were left with the view that the prospects for stability in Gaza are limited and concerned by the explanation that there was a delay in intel regarding the Hamas attacks.

Startup Nation – Dinner with Israeli startups

The Israel Australia Chamber of Commerce hosted a trade dinner to discuss potential collaboration opportunities between Victoria and Israel. The chamber also runs the Victorian trade office in Israel and we were provided a briefing about its activities.

The following people attended the dinner –

Paul Israel – Executive Director IACC

Benny Weizman – Program Manager IACC

Prof. Itamar Glazer (Former Scientific Director at Volcani- Israel's leading Agriculture research organisation, today involved in various Agri-Tech innovations and initiatives)

Gali Artzi- Peakbridge (one of Israel's leading Agri-food VC funds)

Eytan Schwartz- BeeHero (looking to solve the global problem of bees in decline)

Michael Cash- VoicelTT (next gen voice technology for people with non-standard speech)

Arnaud Lorie- The Good Company (VC investing companies solving humanity's greatest challenges in Climate, Health and Education)

Israel Day 4 - 29 April 2025

Northern borders: Sarit Zehavi, The Alma Research and Education Centre

The Alma Research and Education Centre is a non-profit, bipartisan think tank based in Kfar Vradim, northern Israel, dedicated to analysing and educating about the security challenges along Israel's northern borders with Lebanon and Syria. Founded in 2014 by Lieutenant Colonel (Res.) Sarit Zehavi, a former Israeli military intelligence officer, Alma aims to make in-depth geopolitical knowledge about the Middle East accessible to English-speaking audiences.

Alma conducts daily research and analysis on developments in Israel's northern border conflicts, focusing on threats from Hezbollah and Iranian-backed forces. The delegation participated in a field briefing with Sarit from Alma at various lookout posts along the northern borders. Field briefings, lectures and workshops are delivered by Alma to inform decision-makers, researchers, and the public about the unique challenges of this war-torn region, including multiple country borders, domestic residential and commercial areas on all sides of these borders, and the infiltration of terrorist organisations and associated conflict.

Through its comprehensive research and educational initiatives, Alma plays a pivotal role in shaping public understanding and influencing policy decisions related to Israel's security challenges on its northern front.

Quneitra Lookout, Golan Heights, Israel

The field briefings conducted by Sarit Zehavi from Alma included Quneitra Lookout (also known as Mitzpe Ronen), situated on the slopes of Mount Avital in the northern Golan Heights. This vantage point offers expansive views across the Quneitra Valley and southwestern Syria, including the abandoned and heavily bombed city of Quneitra, the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) buffer zone, and the Syrian border approximately one kilometre east of the site. Israeli air defence weaponry is mounted on Mount Avital and visible from the lookout, and the Israeli Defence Force soldiers remain on patrol and have a strong visual presence within the Golan Heights region.

The delegation walked the streets of Golan Heights, where Hezbollah actively bombed homes. Sarit showed a video to the delegation of the bombings of these same buildings, originally live streamed by the terrorist organisation. It is chilling to see homes of civilians under attack by heavy artillery, and see those same homes heavily damaged. Some damaged homes were under repair, with the residents compelled to remain rather than relocate in defiance against terrorist organisations.

The field briefing was a compelling experience for the delegation to understand the harsh realities of the consequences of war on the broader civilian population.

Visit to Majdal Shams (Druze Village)

While this delegation heard many harrowing stories and visited the sites of massacres and unspeakable crimes, the visit to Majdal Shams was perhaps the most emotional of all.

As background, on July 27, 2024, a rocket struck a soccer field in this Druze town in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, killing 12 children and teenagers and injuring at least 42 others.

The victims, aged between 10 and 16, were playing soccer when the attack occurred. Despite the activation of warning sirens, the alert was too brief for the children to reach shelter in time.

The attack was attributed to Hezbollah, which claims to have been targeting a nearby communications base that can be seen from the strike site.

At this site we were met by parents of the children who told us of the tragic happenings of the day, how it put the entire village community into mourning and how they have gone about honouring the lives lost.

The villagers have left the site untouched from the day it occurred, apart from the removal of the remains of their young loved ones.

The bikes the kids rode to the match, near where the rocket hit, still lay in the same places; the shelter they were trying to make it to still has the shrapnel hits embedded in its side, and the fence and pitch damage remain as they were left.

Speaking through interpreters, we were told of the grief experienced and then invited to sit down over an afternoon tea where we were joined by more parents. Many of the mothers of those deceased prepared our coffee and snacks.

The Druze community in Majdal Shams, which has historically maintained a complex relationship with both Israel and Syria, was deeply affected by the tragedy. The attack shattered the town's sense of security.

The experience, like so much on this trip, is difficult to express in words, but is an experience we will never forget. The delegation was presented with a Soccer ball with the faces of all the victims faces which will be presented to the appropriate partner in Victoria.

Israel Day 5 - 30 April 2025

Hostage Square and Hostage Family Forum

The group attended the Memorial Day sirens at Hostage square. Hundreds of supporters attended and viewed the posters of those killed and those taken hostage. At 11am on 30th April every year across Israel, sirens are sounded for 2 minutes to remember fallen soldiers. We happened to be in Hostage square for this solemn reflection.

The group then walked to a meeting where we had a briefing by a family member of a murdered civilian. He volunteers with the Hostages and Missing Families Forum which provides significant support to families of hostages with medical, emotional, and psychological support.

Representatives of the Forum outlined that they have offered to assist international hostages as well. Their services were professional and vast.

The group left with a view that there is a strong support network for hostages and their families but they are dismayed at the remaining hostages who have not yet been released.

Mark Regev - Former Israeli Ambassador to the UK

As a former Australian-Israeli diplomat, Mark Regev provided the group with an important opportunity to discuss not only strategy regional issues but focus on Australian implications. The group discussed not only Australia's decisions and how they were perceived in Israel, but what they fit globally. The discussion was broad ranging and his Australian insights were particularly current – including recent statement by Government and Opposition Ministers.

Conclusion

The delegation's visit to Poland and Israel provided a deeply meaningful opportunity to engage with the historical, cultural, and contemporary dimensions of Jewish life. The program in Poland offered a profound exploration of the rich heritage of European Jewry and the devastating impact of the Holocaust. Commemorating Yom HaShoah at historically significant sites reinforced the enduring importance of remembrance, education, and the fight against antisemitism.

In Israel, the delegation participated in national commemorations and explored the vibrancy of a diverse, democratic society shaped by resilience and renewal. Engagements with government, civil society, and community leaders provided valuable insights into the political, social, and security challenges facing the region, alongside approaches to fostering social cohesion and community resilience relevant to Victoria.

This visit enhanced understanding of how global events affect local communities and underscored the importance of promoting interfaith dialogue and inclusive education. It also fostered international relationships that can support Victoria's ongoing efforts to strengthen multicultural harmony and community resilience.

Reflection from Rachel Westaway MP, Member for Prahran

The visit to Poland provided significant context as to the holocaust and the historic issues regarding antisemitism and the positive and negative impact governments can have regarding social cohesion and management of racism. This is particularly relevant in Australia, a diverse and multicultural country when more than 50% of citizens are born overseas or have a parent born overseas.

The bipartisan participation in the 'March of the Living' and the tour of Poland, provided me with confidence in our unified understanding of the atrocities of war and the devastating legacy of WW2 and the targeting of Jews. Given this was the first bipartisan parliamentary participation in the March of the Living, I was deeply moved by the appreciation of many in my electorate who felt that we had taken the time to obtain a better understanding of their fears and concerns regarding the Holocaust and we should never allow this to occur again.

The visit to Israel was deeply distressing. It highlighted not only the historical nature of the ongoing issues regarding Palestine and Israel but the complexity of any potential solution. It demonstrated the need for countries globally to assist in peace discussions and negotiations. It was an emotional visit in that it demonstrated the impact on so many innocent people and the gravity of war.

I am grateful for the opportunity to understand and see first-hand the atrocities of war, the impact on civilians and the need for us to safeguard Australia as a truly multicultural society free from racism.