

Israel at 60

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When German Chancellor Angela Merkel visited Israel. I had the privilege of joining her on some parts of her visit. I was present during her visit to Sde Boker, both to Ben-Gurion's grave and the kibbutz. Standing there, looking at the desert scenery, I thought about the beginnings of the State of Israel and could only be extremely impressed by the achievements of this country in the past sixty years. Israel was built up in the most difficult circumstances and has had to meet many challenges, among them hostilities and wars with its neighbors and immigration of people from different backgrounds.

Today Israel is a vibrant and strong democracy, a country with a rich cultural life, and a worldwide leader in high technology. Israel is a success story. Yet Israel still faces many challenges to its rights. Some would even say that the very existence of Israel is still challenged. As Chancellor Merkel stated in her speech in the Knesset, Israel's right to exist is a *raison d'être* of the Federal Republic of Germany, and the security of Israel is never negotiable.

Merkel emphasized that these are not hollow words, but must be translated into concrete policies. I would like to quote from the new basic program of the Christian Democratic Union, Merkel's party and the party the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung is close to: "We stand for Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state in secure borders." This is the guideline for the work of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung in Israel, as well in Germany where we celebrated "Israel at 60" with a series of events: conferences, workshops, seminars, and visits to schools.

I grew up and lived for twenty-two years in the German Democratic Republic in the eastern part of Germany. This was a state that never saw any responsibility emanating from the German past towards the State of Israel. On the contrary, the socialist state in Eastern Germany never acknowledged the right of Israel to exist and never established diplomatic relations with it.

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As a member of the church I did not subscribe to the official ideology. Yet being raised in this environment I feel today a special responsibility to work in Israel and for Israel. The cooperation with the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs and this conference is a particularly important part of this mission.