

**Address by the Ambassador Gianluigi Benedetti
on the occasion of the celebration of the Italian National Day
Residence of the Ambassador - May 29, 2019**

Dear Minister of Energy, Dr. Ayoob Kara,

Cabinet Secretary Tzachi Braverman, Mayor of Ramat Gan Carmel Shama-Hacohen,

Colleagues, dear Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Bruchim HaBàim! Benvenuti a tutti!

Welcome to the Italian National Day 2019. My wife Sabina, my daughter Gaia, and I, as well as all members of the Embassy and of the Italian System in Israel, are honoured to host you tonight to celebrate together the 73nd anniversary of the Italian Republic.

This year represents a milestone for our relationship. 70 years ago diplomatic ties between the Republic of Italy and the State of Israel were officially established. An important anniversary, which last January was marked in Jerusalem by an official visit of the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Prof. Moavero Milanesi.

Therefore this year the National Day gives us a fruitful opportunity to look back at the joint achievements that have enriched our common path throughout the last 70 years, based upon a solid bedrock: the never ending cooperation and mutual respect among our Governments, among our peoples.

On one side, we are two young Countries, emerged out of the ashes of the Second World War; on the other, both the Republic of Italy and the State of Israel have always had a unique standing and a meaningful bond within the international community due to their rich cultures and deep roots.

As a matter of fact, in just seven decades, we have made great strides, embracing democracy, diversity and the respect of human rights, while becoming world leaders in numerous sectors. All of this has been possible thanks to our shared values, to our belonging to one of the main cradles of civilization: the Mediterranean basin.

The basis of the understanding between our two countries is indeed this shared origin of civilization, that thousands of years ago inhabited the shores of the Mediterranean, creating a universal culture with a solid network of cultural exchanges and commerce.

The dramatic history of the Jewish people has brought to Rome the most ancient Jewish community outside *Eretz Israel*. Such community has maintained a deep-rooted and original identity and has given a precious contribution to the economic, political and social development of Italy.

In particular, I would like to mention the Jewish participation in the intellectual and cultural life in modern Italy, a relevant added value in almost every sector. Let me just recall this evening the massive presence of Jewish authors in Italian literature and poetry from the Ninth Century until our days.

Culture, and science, can improve the world. We can all be protagonists of this action of *tikkun olam*. An outstanding example is beyond doubt Primo Levi, which was born 100 years ago, whose immense literary contributions remind us of the abyss of the Holocaust as well as the profound value of Memory.

In those years of immense tragedy all over Europe and the whole world, our Country witnessed and benefited from the heroic intervention of the Jewish Brigade. These heroes who, leaving their homelands behind, came to fight in Italy against the Nazi-fascist regime, continue representing a source of pride and inspiration.

Some of them are here with us tonight. Let me tell them: *todà rabà!* Last October I had the privilege, on behalf of the President of the Republic, Sergio Mattarella, to honour them with the *Medaglia d'Oro al Valor Militare* that our Parliament bestowed upon the Brigade in a historic decision.

Although thousands of Italian Jews have enriched our national fabric and sometimes even sacrificing themselves as in the battles of the Risorgimento and the First World War, in 1938 the Italian Jewish communities suffered from the terrible blow of racist laws.

At the *Yad Vashem* on January 27 last on the occasion of the International Holocaust Remembrance Day, the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs firmly stated: "As an Italian among Italians, I do apologize for the atrocious acts

committed by my Country, in shameful years where the savagery of some co-existed with the pettiness of many fellow Italians”.

Every day we must reiterate our responsibility to fight those who deny these atrocities; we must stand together to combat antisemitism, which continues, still today, to undermine the security of our Jewish brothers and threatens the very core of our values.

“As Italians”, the President of the Republic, Sergio Mattarella, recalled last January during a commemoration event at the Quirinale Palace, “we have the moral duty to fight each and every hotbed of hate, racism and Holocaust denial. We must refuse the virus of indifference”.

Such process has also shed light on the glorious stories of the numerous Italians who were not hit by such virus, who had the courage to listen to their own conscience and risk their own lives to save hundreds of Jews from death. The example set by those “Righteous Among the Nations” keeps on inspiring us with courage and renews our commitment to foster Memory.

This evening let me also recall other Italian Jews that on these shores, in this land, have guaranteed an extraordinary contribution to the creation of the State of Israel. It is the epic of the *italkim*, who all over these seven decades have left a permanent mark in the culture, science and history of Italy. It’s a great number, as you can imagine, in terms of quantity as well at the level of professionalism.

Among these, as representatives of different and relevant sectors within Israeli society, let me remember this evening: Giulio Racah, rector of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem who received the prestigious Israeli Prize for the Exact Sciences; Renato Jarach, a successful businessman who was among the founders of the Italian Synagogue in Jerusalem; and Umberto Nahon, who served between 1948 and 1970 as secretary of the Zionist Congresses and was also responsible for the management of the Mount Herzl.

The historical confidence and the tight bond between our peoples have stimulated all over these years Italian-Israeli relations at the institutional level beyond any expectation. We are now one of the Countries with which Israel holds a strategic dialogue over fundamental security and military issues.

This year a Government to Government summit, that Italy has with only a few other States, is expected to take place in Jerusalem, together with a relevant participation of leading Italian firms. We are one of the first European partners in scientific research. We have performed an extraordinary qualitative leap of bilateral cooperation in the critical sector of industrial innovation.

Given such a strong and continuous collaboration, the notion of BDS is just nonsense! When it seems that the pride of ignorance is emerging, we must work to develop the pride of culture. We can only do this together; that's why we are resolutely against any form of boycott of mutual relations; that is why we stand by our friendship to Israel and we are committed to strengthening, never weakening, our ties.

The strategy that has made all this possible is based, first and foremost, on a deep sharing of Israel's causes, of its right to existence and self-defense. As Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini recalled during his visit last December, "Italy will always stand by Israel, a real stronghold of democracy in such an unstable region".

Therefore, we incessantly support, thanks to our military forces, international initiatives that contribute to stabilize the area. Let me recall the Italian strong commitment along the "Blue line" in Lebanon where we deploy more than 1,000 peacekeepers in UNIFIL and ensure an active leadership and command; the participation in the Multinational Force and Observers mission in the Red Sea; the training activity in Jericho and, for many years, the participation in the multinational observation force in Hebron, both ensured by our Carabinieri.

In this respect, it is our duty to remain vigilant so that values of respect for human dignity, rejection of violence, peaceful coexistence and regional cooperation prevail. As Albert Einstein once stated, "Peace cannot be kept by force, it can only be achieved by mutual understanding".

It is along this line of reasoning that we must promote the huge opportunities that have been opening in the entire Mediterranean region, without fearing the uncertainties that equally emerge in the present phase. Italy, the European Union and Israel can do a lot towards this objective.

Within this realm, I want to mention as a clear proof of the great level of potential cooperation the energy and gas sector, where our and other Countries are playing a crucial role for a regional cooperation that can foster

peaceful relations in the whole region, through the lens of a fruitful energy pragmatism. An approach which was also strongly underlined by the Italian Prime Minister, Giuseppe Conte, during the Arab League Summit, last February in Sharm El-Sheikh.

Dear friends, let me send a special thank this evening – also on behalf of my wife Sabina – to the numerous Italian clerics and nuns who work in the Holy Land. In all of you I see true “Peace Builders”. Your religious mission, your commitment to the education of younger generations, your relentless dedication to support the weak and needy of society – be they Christian, Jewish or Muslim – is a powerful teaching to all of us and an unparalleled message of peace.

With relation to that, in these days I am appreciating the festivities of Ramadan (and I wish our Muslim guests Ramadan Mubarak), Shavuot and Christian Pentecoste.

Before concluding, let me thank and praise the amazing pop music ensemble from Italy, collecting the best musicians and composers from the Pop Rock Department in “Giuseppe Verdi” Music Conservatory of Milan, together with an extraordinary string trio from the Classic Department.

I also want to stress my appreciation to the personnel of the Embassy, the Cultural Institute, the Trade Agency and the Chamber of Commerce as well as Chef Michele, Chef Emanuela and the cook team, to the Pizzaiuolo Michele who came from Naples to bake for us the real Italian Pizza, who all made this event possible. Allow me also to extend my gratitude to all the institutions and companies whose generosity has helped the success of this evening.

Well, believe it or not, we did a lot of our journey together. And I am sure there is still a long way to go. We want more Italy in Israel and more Israel in Italy.

As President Rivlin reminded us, on the occasion of the reception for the diplomatic corps celebrating Israel’s 71st Independence Day, “Israel is a small country, but we have big dreams. We are a superpower of hope. Hope for a better future for all humanity”.

It is a hope that Italy - and the European Union - do share with Israel.

Our past provides the fuel for our dreams, our dreams can be the projects for our future. We must walk together toward the future.

Viva l'Italia! Mazal Tov Israel!