

Israel Mourns Fallen Soldiers, Celebrates 61 Years of Independence

Israelis shifted gears on Tuesday evening from mourning its  fallen soldiers to celebrating the nation's 61st Independence Day.

Opening the official ceremony at Mount Herzl in Jerusalem, Knesset Speaker Reuven Rivlin said, "We have come once again to this hill—on one side the grave of the prophet [of Zionism], on the other the graves of our children—to remind ourselves once again from where we came, and where, with the grace of God, with the blood of our children and with the sweat of our brow, we have succeeded in reaching so far.

Rivlin said that moving directly from Remembrance Day to Independence Day is the "purest preparation" for the subsequent joy. Earlier in the week, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told a memorial gathering to honor slain Israeli soldiers and that the global threat of terror was greater than ever. "We have no choice but to fight terror until it is obliterated and to defend our lives," he said.

Addressing bereaved families gathered for the official state ceremony at the Mount Herzl military ceremony, Netanyahu continued: "The price we have paid and are still paying is unbearable, I know. My family has also been struck by bereavement; your sorrow is my sorrow. I feel the pain deep in my heart and carry with me the memory, the yearning and the burden of the loss."

The prime minister's brother Jonathan was killed during the 1976 IDF raid on Entebbe to free Israeli hostages.

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