

# Historic Tribute to Congress and Obama Administration For Its Support of Iron Dome Anti-Missile Defense System

BY AARON TROODLER

Spring may not have come yet to Washington, D.C., but on February 27 the unique relationship between the U.S. and Israel was in full bloom. Several hundred Jewish leaders from across the U.S. journeyed to Washington to offer their gratitude to members of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives for their staunch support of the U.S.-Israel relationship. Nearly two dozen members of Congress, whether ultra-conservative or extremely liberal, put partisanship aside and joined this event to stand united with Israel.

The Iron Dome Congressional Tribute was chaired by Robert Rechnitz, a prominent L.A.-based Jewish philanthropist and businessman who is the Principal of Bomel Companies, and coordinated by The Friedlander Group under the stewardship of its CEO, Ezra Friedlander.

This historic event was a celebration of the U.S.-Israel alliance and a tribute to the U.S. Congress for the Iron Dome Missile Defense System. There was also a tribute to the memory of Senator Daniel Inouye of Hawaii, who was a courageous defender of Israel, a stalwart supporter of the U.S.-Israel bond, and instrumental in securing funding for Iron Dome.

During the recent attacks in Israel in November 2012, the world witnessed the technological marvels of the Iron Dome, which saved the lives of thousands of civilians. With thousands of deadly rockets raining down on Israeli cities, the Iron Dome effectively disabled the overwhelming majority of those rockets and prevented widespread devastation. Since 2009 the Obama administration and the U.S. Congress have allocated an unprecedented \$275 million in funding for the System.

In his remarks, Robert Rechnitz declared: "We have no political agenda. We are here to simply offer our gratitude to the United States for its unwavering support of Israel."

House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Ed Royce, whose father liberated Dachau as a member of the American military after World War II, spoke about the 90-percent success rate of the Iron Dome in November and how important it was that Americans got the opportunity to see the defense system work effectively.

"My overriding goal as Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee is to strengthen American allies like Israel and weaken our enemies like Iran and Hizbullah," said Congressman Royce.

Senator Wicker talked about the great relationship between Israel and the U.S., pointing to Israel's "hostile neighborhood" as a reason to "support Iron Dome."

Senator Rand Paul, just back from Israel, said, "It is not our job to tell Israelis where they can or

cannot build."

Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, a vocal supporter of Israel, noted that she is introducing the Iron Dome Support Act, a testament to how much the U.S. values its relationship with Israel. "The Iron Dome saved thousands of lives and it must continue to do so," said the Congresswoman.

with great emotion: "You're a great defender of Israel; you're a great builder of Jerusalem, you're a friend to the Jewish people worldwide, you're a great friend to our prime minister, and for all of that, in the name of the state and the people and the government of Israel, I'd like to say *today, today rabbah*."



L-R: Israeli Ambassador to the U.S. Michael Oren; Ezra Friedlander, CEO of The Friedlander Group; Phil Rosen; Robert Rechnitz, Chairman, Iron Dome Tribute; Congressman Ed Royce, Chairman, House Foreign Affairs Committee; R. James Woolsey, Jr., former CIA Director; Jona Rechnitz.



Robert Rechnitz, C, Chairman of the Iron Dome Congressional Tribute, presents Eric Lynn, L, Office of the Secretary of Defense, with the Commemorative Iron Dome Medal. Ezra Friedlander of the Friedlander Group is at right.

Senator James Inhofe said that American and Israeli "interests are the same and I am going to make sure that it stays that way."

Congressman Adam Schiff evoked laughter while discussing his recent trip to Israel. "When your name is Adam and you're married to a woman named Eve, going to Israel is like coming home... it's *bashert!*"

Israeli Ambassador to the U.S. Michael Oren noted that Iron Dome is the first anti-ballistic system to prove successful in combat. "Iron Dome doesn't only save lives, it prevents wars..." said Ambassador Oren. "Behind the Iron Dome stands a marble dome — the Capitol of the United States of America."

The Ambassador also paid tribute to the late Senator Daniel Inouye and introduced his wife, Irene Inouye, who said her husband had valued the strong bond between the U.S. and Israel. "Dan wanted peace," she said. "I hope that it will be achieved in our lifetime."

Bill Thompson, Jr., former NYC Comptroller, also voiced his strong support for the U.S.-Israel relationship.

Ambassador Oren paid tribute to Mr. Robert Rechnitz and stated

Chaskel Bennett, noted *askan*, described what happens in southern Israel when the siren sounds to warn of an incoming rocket. "When a siren sounds, you have 15 seconds to get to safety," he said. "Yes, we believe in G-d and prayer, but the Iron Dome is a game-changer."

Senator Mark Warner talked about the tremendous vision Senator Inouye had when it came to the bond between the U.S. and Israel.

Former CIA Director R. James Woolsey described the remarkable nature of the Iron Dome System. "The Iron Dome avoids wasting defense on incoming rockets that won't hit anywhere sensitive."

Senator Brian Schatz of Hawaii talked about his predecessor, Senator Inouye, and the demonstration of his unwavering support for Israel when he secured funds for the Iron Dome. "No one can fill [Sen. Inouye's] shoes," he said, "but we have to follow in his footsteps."

Congressman Trent Franks said that "the Iron Dome has become the face of missile defense for the world." He also discussed the perseverance of the Jewish people.

"After the Holocaust, the Jews wiped away their tears and built a nation. The Nazis are gone, but Israel remains."

Congressman Joe Kennedy spoke about his visit to Sderot and the impact of seeing reinforced bus shelters that doubled as bomb shelters. "The only thing Israel asks for is the right to exist," he said. "That's not too much to ask."

Congressman Eliot Engel, introduced by Stanley Treitel of Los Angeles, said that the Iron Dome "allowed the United States to put its money where its mouth is."

"Support for Israel is strong and it's bipartisan and that's the way it should be," Congressman Engel said. "The bond between the United States and Israel is strong and it is unbreakable."

Senator Pat Roberts said, "Israel has a right to exist and we have to defend that right at every opportunity."

One of the more powerful and emotional moments of the Iron Dome Congressional Tribute came during the introduction of Senator Jeanne Shaheen, who has been resolute in her support of Israel during her tenure as a public servant.

Senator Shaheen was introduced by Mrs. Ruth Lichtenstein, the publisher of *Hamodia*, founder and director of Project Witness, and editor-in-chief of *Witness to History*, the nation-by-nation history of the Holocaust.

Mrs. Lichtenstein began her remarks by saying, "Let me introduce the real me. I am a proud child of two Holocaust survivors. My mother was ten years old when World War II broke out. She was sixteen when she was liberated on the last day of World War II."

With that captivating backdrop, Mrs. Lichtenstein described how her family, who lived in Jerusalem in 1967, endured a period of time when the city was bombed constantly for a number of days.

"We didn't even have a shelter in which to hide," she told the crowd at the Iron Dome Congressional Tribute. "We stayed on the first floor and my mother was the heroine. She was the one who encouraged everyone."

Mrs. Lichtenstein recounted that after the bombing ceased, her family finally emerged from their home, and she was absolutely amazed to see that her whole neighborhood had essentially been destroyed.

"Suddenly I saw my mother cry bitterly," she said. "I couldn't understand. And when I asked her why she was crying, she said, 'You don't understand. We are winning, we are winning, we are winning.'"

"In the name of my mother, in the name of Holocaust survivors all over the world, I would like to thank the United States government, Senators, Congressmen, and whoever else is involved, for

making sure that Israel has the Iron Dome anti-missile defense system."

Mrs. Lichtenstein's heartfelt and poignant remarks, in which she expressed her gratitude for the Iron Dome system in the context of her own familial history and personal experiences, drew a huge well-deserved round of applause from all those assembled and was one of the more memorable moments of this special event.

Other individuals who spoke at the tribute luncheon included Senator Joe Donnelly, who was introduced by Rabbi Yehiel Kalish of Agudath Israel, and Senator Mark Pryor, who was introduced by Senator Johnny Isakson and Leon Goldenberg.

In addition, the crowd heard from Tevi Troy, the former Deputy Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and President George W. Bush's liaison to the Jewish community.

At the conclusion of the Iron Dome Tribute Luncheon, participants were invited to a White House briefing with members of the Obama administration, including Zachary Kelly, President Obama's liaison to the Jewish community; Eric Lynn, a senior policy advisor on Mideast affairs at the Department of Defense, and Andy Abel, Director for Israeli, Palestinian and Jordanian Affairs for the National Security Staff.

The Obama administration has been instrumental in the development and funding of the Iron Dome anti-missile defense system and has continuously stood with Israel. The briefing provided those in attendance with an opportunity to learn firsthand about the Iron Dome system and hear how committed the Obama administration is to the safety and security of Israel.

At the conclusion of the White House briefing, Robert Rechnitz, Chairman of the Iron Dome Congressional Tribute, presented the Iron Dome Commemorative Medal to Eric Lynn in recognition of the integral role that President Obama played in the development of the Iron Dome system and as an acknowledgment of the countless Israeli lives that were saved as a result of Iron Dome.

"Members of Congress and White House officials walked away from the conference with a clear sense of just how much the Jewish community appreciates their support of the Iron Dome System and their commitment to further cementing and enhancing the U.S.-Israel relationship."

"In an environment where partisanship often causes rifts among our elected officials, it was extremely heartwarming to see that our leaders in Washington were able to bridge their partisan divides and stand in unison with Jewish leaders at the historic Iron Dome Congressional Tribute," emphasized Robert Rechnitz.