

NATIONAL (MAY 8, 2006)

## PM to receive B'nai B'rith's top honour

### Gedaliah Afterman

PRIME Minister John Howard will be presented the prestigious B'nai B'rith international Presidential Gold Medal for his "outstanding" support of Israel and the Jewish people at a ceremony in Washington on Tuesday, May 16.

A spokesperson for the prime minister told the AJN that Howard was "deeply honoured" by the award, and that "Australia's consistent support for the State of Israel is based on principle and a profound respect for the courage and achievements of the Jewish people".

B'nai B'rith Australia/New Zealand president James Altman said: "In a world where many countries are demonising Israel, which is leading to antisemitism in those countries, John Howard and his government have been a beacon of light against that trend."

Howard's commitment to Israel and the Jewish community was also the topic of an address last week to the American Jewish Committee (AJC), in which he praised Australian Jewry's "invaluable contribution" to the broader community, and reiterated the government's "steadfast" commitment to a "safe and secure Israel".

In a congratulatory video message screened at the AJC's 100th annual meeting in Washington, Howard said the Australian Jewish community "plays a major role in strengthening the friendship between Australia and Israel and in bringing us closer to our allies".

Congratulating the AJC for its accomplishments on human-rights issues and the advancement of inter-faith relations, the PM stated: "The international Jewish community and the state of Israel have no closer friends than Australia and the United States."

Howard, who last visited Israel in 2000, is tipped to return to the Jewish State as early as July, following an invitation from Prime Minister Ehud Olmert.

Last year, Howard completed a rare trifecta by receiving awards from three organisations in recognition of his support for Jewish causes: Sydney's Jewish Communal Appeal, the AJC and the Australia-Israel Chamber of Commerce.

A strong Australian delegation at the AJC conference included Mark Leibler, who is national chairman of the Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council (AIJAC), an AJC affiliate; AIJAC executive director Dr Colin Rubenstein, who presented a session on opportunities for strengthening ties with South-East Asia; and former Executive Council of Australian Jewry president and current AIJAC director of international affairs Jeremy Jones, who gave a presentation on antisemitism. Six representatives of the Australasian Union of Jewish Students were also present.