

Sir Frank Lowy, Mark Leibler awarded Israel's highest civilian honour

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Mark Leibler and Frank Lowy, second and third from left, with Israel President Isaac Herzog, first lady Michal Herzog and other medal recipients. Picture: Haim Zach

Two of Australia's most prominent Jewish leaders, businessman Sir Frank Lowy and Melbourne lawyer Mark Leibler, have been awarded Israel's highest civilian award, the Israeli Presidential Medal of Honour, in Jerusalem.

Israel President Isaac Herzog honoured Sir Frank and Mr Leibler, as well as five others from around the world, with the prestigious medal [in recognition of their decades-long contributions](#) to the State of Israel and the Jewish people, and especially for unwavering commitment since the Hamas attacks on October 7, 2023.

Mr Herzog hugged both Mr Leibler and Sir Frank in what could help restore recently "frayed" diplomatic relations between Australia and Israel following anti-Semitic attacks in Melbourne and Sydney, and the [Anthony Albanese government's shifting position away from providing unwavering support for Israel](#).

Mr Herzog told guests at his presidential residence that Mr Leibler had “fortified the invaluable relationship between Israel and Australia and the Australian Jewish community, and courageously defended Israel’s good name”.

He then addressed Sir Frank, saying, “you rose from the ashes of the Holocaust, providing us a lifetime of impassioned inspiration and a legacy of loving dedication, forming magnificent connections for Israel around the world”.

Mr Leibler, 81, the senior partner at Arnold Bloch Leibler, told The Australian: “Those who know me know I am not a shrinking violet, but this honour has truly humbled me”. He added: “It is highly moving and humbling, and a little embarrassing as the real heroes are the brave soldiers risking their lives to protect and defend Israel and its people.”

He said the award would help to strengthen the bonds between Australia and Israel “because at the moment the relationship is a little frayed” despite the two countries being “two wonderful democracies”.

He said upon receiving the medal that he was thinking of his forebears: his maternal grandparents, who died during the Holocaust at Auschwitz-Birkenau, and his parents, including his father, who died suddenly at 47, as well as the continuity of Jewish people and how Israel was central to Jewish life.

Sir Frank, 94, the founder of the successful global retail centres Westfield and a generous philanthropist, honoured his father, who died at Auschwitz-Birkenau by presenting the Holocaust museum there with a restored railway wagon to remind visitors of how millions were transported to their deaths.

Mr Lowy said: “I feel honoured and privileged that I am the recipient of the Presidential Medal of Honour, and grateful to have been selected for this honour by the state of Israel. I hope and trust that I am a worthy recipient of this medal.”

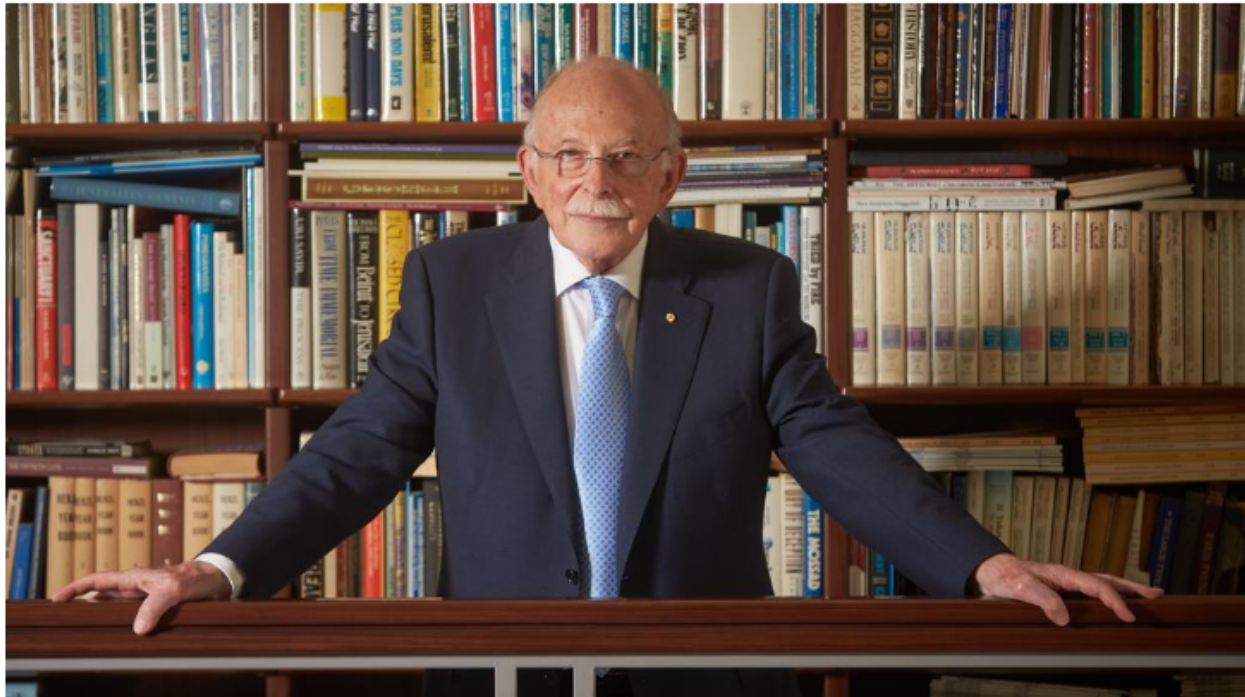
The medal of honour was established in 2012 by former President Shimon Peres and has been awarded to less than 50 people, mostly Israelis.



Sir Frank Lowy with Rabbi Benji at the Israel presidential residence. Picture: Facebook

Sir Frank and Mr Leibler are the first Australian recipients. Past non-Israeli recipients include US presidents Bill Clinton, Barack Obama and Joe Biden, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and film director Steven Spielberg.

Citations were read about each recipient during the presentation.



Mr Leibler at his home in Caulfield North. Picture: Valeriu Campan

Sir Frank was hailed for being “an Australian businessman and Israeli philanthropist; for safeguarding spiritual Israeli treasures; and bolstering Israeli academia, medical research, strategic studies and culture in all its forms; for instilling Jewish pride within the glorious Australian Jewish community and fostering outstanding Israeli-Australian relations; and for his indispensable contribution to Holocaust education and immortalising those who perished; for never forgetting where he came from and where he is going”.

Mr Leibler’s citation was for being “an Australian Jewish leader and activist; for exemplifying the Jewish objective of repairing the world by championing human rights and social justice in its truest and broadest sense; for courageously defending Israel’s reputation and fighting against boycotts; for maintaining respectful lines of communication with all sectors, for engaging with every community and political leadership; for anchoring his value system in truth and for always [aligning his deeds with a moral compass](#); and for always providing admirable leadership and inspirational activity with deep integrity.”

Others to be honoured were Maurice Lévy of France, Malcolm Hoenlein and Julie Platt, both of the US, Briton Sir Trevor Chinn and Brigitte Zypries from Germany.

Mr Herzog said that in “this particular period of unprecedented challenges and turmoil” it was precisely the right moment to “applaud those who light our way”.

He said it was an opportunity to pause and recognise the unthinkable hardships of the Jewish communities, including the present time, noting “a war is forced upon us and the agony of 99 hostages held in brutal captivity in Gaza”.

“They have not seen the light of day or a glimpse of hope in 460 days,” Mr Herzog said, before adding, “as we speak Jews around the world are assaulted and insulted and diaspora communities are targeted and anti-Semitism is widespread more than ever”.