

2013-J3356

LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION mourning the death of Ariel Sharon, former President of Israel, celebrated military leader, public official, and statesman

WHEREAS, It is with sorrow, admiration, and respect that this Legislative Body is moved to pay tribute to a distinguished leader of indomitable spirit and dedication, whose purposeful life and accomplishments will forever stand as an inspiration to others; and

WHEREAS, This Legislative Body is proud to inscribe upon its records this memorial to Ariel Sharon, former President of Israel, military leader, statesman, and farmer, who died on Saturday, January 11, 2014, at the age of 85; and

WHEREAS, Ariel Sharon was born Ariel Scheinermann to a family of Russian immigrants; his childhood and youth spent in Kfar Malal, a farming community north of Tel Aviv, then the British Mandate of Palestine; and

WHEREAS, Ariel Sharon was involved with the Zionist movement from his early youth; at the age of 14 he joined the Haganah, a local militia charged with guarding Jewish settlements, and in December 1947 he became a full-time soldier in the Israel Defense Force (IDF); and

WHEREAS, In 1948, Ariel Sharon distinguished himself during Israel's War of Independence; a junior officer, he led an infantry company and was seriously injured in the battle of Latrun; after the war, he remained in uniform and served as an intelligence officer while studying Middle Eastern history at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem; and

WHEREAS, Ariel Sharon continued to gain recognition and notoriety as a military leader; in 1953, he created and ran an elite military group known as Unit 101, a special branch of the IDF charged with launching retaliatory strikes against Palestinian irregulars, and, during a

conflict with Egypt over the Suez Canal, the Arab-Israeli War of 1956, he commanded a brigade of paratroopers in Sinai who captured the strategic Mitla Pass, but also caused heavy losses on both sides; and

WHEREAS, In 1957, Ariel Sharon resumed his education; he attended Staff College in Camberley, England, for officer training, and he later studied part-time for a law degree, which he earned in 1966; and

WHEREAS, Ariel Sharon rose steadily within the IDF ranks, becoming a major general by the time of the 1967 Six-Day War; as the chief of southern command, he handled the Suez Canal area during the War of Attrition in 1969, and also led the operation to quell the Palestine Liberation Organization in the Gaza Strip in 1971; and

WHEREAS, As the 1970s progressed, Ariel Sharon transformed from a famous military leader into a public official; he helped to found the Likud Party from which he was elected into the Knesset in December 1973; he also initiated a program to create Jewish settlements in such contested areas as the Gaza Strip during the administration of Prime Minister Menachem Begin, ultimately overseeing the development of more than 200 settlements; and

WHEREAS, Fiercely committed to Israel's security, Ariel Sharon was appointed Minister of Defense by Prime Minister Begin in 1981; in this capacity he renewed diplomatic ties with a number of African nations, and assisted in the immigration of large numbers of Ethiopian Jews to Israel; he was also the principal architect of Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982, which led to a decades-long military presence in Lebanon by Israeli troops; he was removed as Minister of Defense in 1983; and

WHEREAS, Undaunted, and steadfast in his commitment to the wellbeing and development of his country, Ariel Sharon served as Minister of Industry and Trade from 1984 to 1990, where he was instrumental in signing the 1985 free trade agreement with the United States, and Minister of Construction and Housing from 1990 to 1992, where he managed the

building of 144,000 new apartments created in occupied territory to meet the needs of the country's growing population, which included a new wave of immigrants arriving in Israel from the Soviet Union; and

WHEREAS, In 1996 this dynamic leader was appointed Minister of National Infrastructure, and in 1998 he was named Foreign Minister; Ariel Sharon became the chairman of the Likud Party in 1999; it was in this position that, in 2000, he made a controversial trip to Jerusalem to visit the Temple Mount, a Jewish holy site that is also home to the al-Aqsa Mosque, a site holy to Muslims; he subsequently won election as Prime Minister; and

WHEREAS, As Israel's prime minister, Ariel Sharon initially continued his relentless pursuit of security for his country through military means, launching Operation Defensive Shield, a military offensive in several Palestinian areas, in 2002; however, as his time in office progressed, he shifted his approach towards a policy of disengagement with the Palestinians; in 2003 he unveiled a plan that called for a withdrawal of Jewish settlers from the Gaza Strip, because he supported a separate Palestinian state; and

WHEREAS, In 2005, Ariel Sharon broke with the Likud Party to form a new centrist political group, the Kadima Party; however, he was tragically incapacitated by a massive stroke the following January which left him in a coma; he was replaced as Prime Minister in April 2006, and after spending eight years in the coma, Ariel Sharon died at the age of 85; and

WHEREAS, Ariel Sharon was predeceased by his first wife, the former Margalit Zimmerman, their son, Gur, and his second wife, Lily; he is survived by his sons, Omri and Gilad; and

WHEREAS, Ariel Sharon was a bold, visionary, and dedicated leader, who devoted his life to the state of Israel, and was an inspiration to Jewish people throughout the world; he will be long remembered for his nearly unstoppable determination to do what he deemed in the best interest of his nation's security; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to mourn the death of Ariel Sharon, former Prime Minister of Israel, remembering his purposeful life and countless achievements, and expressing its sincerest condolences to his family and nation; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be tran-

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mitted to the family of Ariel Sharon.