Thank you Lana.

I want to invite my colleagues, the members of the RAV Israel Delegation to join me on stage.

Rabbi Brown, Rabbi Bregman, Rabbi Rosenblatt, Rabbi Infeld, Rabbi Tendler, Rabbi Gibbs and Rabbi Hannah Dresner who is joining us on the mission but is not able to be here tonight.

People ask us why are you going to Israel?

I guess we all have our own reasons but an answer we share, the reason that has united us in our work for this community before Oct 7 and every day after, is that we are going because of you.

We are going to Israel because of this right here, this incredible Jewish community, and our supporters and allies who stand with us in our hour of need. We are going because your light, which shines so brightly in this dark time, is lighting our way. You're a beacon of hope, solidarity, peace and empathy. And we are going to bring that light, bring that message, the message of hanukkah, of resilience, of dedication, and rededication, of religious freedom, of the few fighting to preserve that freedom

against the many who seek to destroy it and us in the process.

We are going to assure Israelis that they are not alone, that the people of Vancouver stand with them, stand with the families of the bereaved, the wounded, the hostages, and all of those innocents in Israel and in Gaza that have been devastated, uprooted and traumatized by Hamas and by the war that followed their brutal attack on October 7th. We stand with them, we stand with Israel, we stand for peace!

During our three day mission we will be meeting with Israeli thought leaders, survivors, wounded soldiers, Israeli citizens, Jews and Arabs; we will hear with our own ears what people experienced on October 7 and what it has been like in the two months since. We will visit Kfar Aza, one of the kibbutzim decimated by Hamas terrorists. We will see with our own eyes and bear witness to the inhumanity and devastation. We will sit and pray with the families of hostages that wait, and pray, and long for the return of their loved ones. We will place a stone and say kaddish at the grave of Ben Mizrachi, may his memory be a blessing השם יקום דמו (*Hashem yikkom damo)*

From your generous donations of warm clothing and supplies, we are bringing bags of cold weather gear for

reservists in the north who cannot leave their posts defending the border to get what they need as the weather grows colder. We're Canadians, we know the blessing of warm socks, gloves, hats and long underwear - so we'll deliver.

Also through your donations we are literally bringing this light, the light of hanukkah with us as well. We will be hosting a hanukkah party for dozens of families who were evacuated from Sderot, the largest town near the Gaza border. We will provide music, and entertainment, and food, and hanukkah presents, everything we could think of, everything they asked for so that this light, the light of hanukkah, the light of the Jewish people, the light of *am yisrael* –the Jewish People–shines as brightly there as it does here tonight, and may that light never, ever go out!