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NEWS RELEASE

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Governor Whitman Receives Friend of Zion Award, Visits Yad Vashem Memorial in Jerusalem

New Jersey Governor Christie Whitman today was presented with the prestigious Friend of Zion award by Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at a ceremony before the Israeli Knesset. Other recipients of the award are Senator Joseph Biden; former British Prime Minister Lady Margaret Thatcher; and Jeane Kirkpatrick, former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations.

Gov. Whitman was awarded the Friend of Zion by the Jerusalem Fund of Aish HaTorah for her administration's record on Israel and Jewish community issues. She created the first New Jersey trade office in Israel and in 1996 led New Jersey's largest foreign trade mission to Israel. New Jersey's Holocaust Education Act, mandating Holocaust education in all public schools, has become a model for the nation. Gov. Whitman also has doubled funding to the New Jersey Israel Commission.

The Governor, who along with Lady Thatcher was a featured speaker at the awards ceremony, told the Israeli parliament that in New Jersey and throughout the world, leaders must teach our children that "values do count."

"Fighting for freedom can produce outstanding soldiers just as fighting against evil can produce true heroes. There are high values worth fighting for, values that keep us moving ever forward in the face of tyranny," Gov. Whitman said.

"For me, what's most important is that our children must see that there's a better world. They must understand that Israel and the United States were founded on fundamental principles of morality. They must understand that high values still count and are worth fighting for - in war and in peace," she said.

The Friend of Zion award is reserved for leaders who have played key roles in promoting strong ties between Israel and the United States or Great Britain.

Aish HaTorah, meaning "the fire of Torah," is a Jewish educational outreach organization founded 24 years ago in Jerusalem by American-born Rabbi Noah Weinberg. The Jerusalem Fund raises money internationally in support of the Aish HaTorah College of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem and its worldwide Jewish educational outreach projects and events.

Earlier today, Gov. Whitman and Lady Thatcher laid a wreath at a Holocaust memorial service and toured exhibits at Yad Vashem, the Jerusalem museum honoring victims of the Holocaust. The floor of the memorial is comprised of mosaic tiles representing the 6 million Jewish victims of the Holocaust.

Earlier in the three-day trip, the Governor attended the grand opening of the new amphitheater of the Ra'anana Symphonette, a 56-member professional symphony of recent immigrants. The symphonette was founded seven years ago by volunteers who wanted to provide career opportunities to immigrant musicians arriving in Israel.

On the final day of her second trip to Israel since taking office, Gov. Whitman said Israel and New Jersey "have forged a true alliance of shared values, one that will help our young people understand the fundamental goodness of our societies."

"The bonds we've formed and the values we share will continue to keep us close. These are bonds not of government to government, but of people to people. Bonds of friendship and solidarity. Bonds that will grow deeper in this anniversary year and far into the future," she said.

