Founding of the State of Israel, May 14, 1948

Israel's establishment as an independent, sovereign state was officially declared in Tel-Aviv on Friday May 14, 1948 by Zionist leader David Ben-Gurion. Ben-Gurion's declaration came on the day the British Mandate over Palestine was officially terminated, in accordance with UN Resolution 181 which called for the division of the land into a Jewish state and an Arab state.

Standing at the podium of what is now called Independence Hall, Ben-Gurion read Israel's Declaration of Independence, proclaiming the founding values of the new state:

“...the establishment of the Jewish State in Palestine, to be called Israel...The State of Israel will be open to the immigration of Jews from all countries of their dispersion; will promote development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; will be based on the precepts of liberty, justice and peace taught by the Hebrew Prophets; will uphold the full social and political equality of all its citizens, without distinction of race, creed, or sex; will guarantee full freedom of conscience, worship, education and culture; will safeguard the sanctity and inviolability of the shrines and Holy Places of all religions; and will dedicate itself to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations...We offer peace and unity to all the neighboring states and their peoples, and invite them to cooperate with the independent Jewish nation for the common good of all.”
The political, social and economic institutions which governed Jewish life in the pre-state period served as the infrastructure of the new state. Despite the euphoria of the moment, Israel faced imminent disaster with an expected invasion by Arab nations who rejected the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine.

Outnumbered in soldiers and arms, the new Israeli army was attacked from all directions. In addition, the fledgling state had to deal with the huge challenge of absorbing shiploads of Jewish immigrants who arrived daily – many penniless Holocaust survivors and refugees from Arab states.

Palestinians refer to the events surrounding the establishment of the State of Israel as the Nakba, or catastrophe.