There have been just 25 Governors-General since the advent of Australian nationhood in 1901. None has served with more distinction than Sir Zelman Cowen.

The Hon Julia Gillard MP
Prime Minister, condolence motion in the House of Representatives
7 February 2012

He was truly great and he was truly good, and our country is deeply in his debt.

The Hon Tony Abbott MP
Leader of the Opposition, condolence motion in the House of Representatives
7 February 2012
The Sir Zelman Cowen Memorial Oration

The oration is an annual public lecture celebrating the life and legacy of Sir Zelman Cowen, a distinguished scholar, educator, civic leader and – for five years – Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia.

It is a forum for learning and debate on matters of public interest and themes relevant to Sir Zelman’s life, including law, justice, leadership, community, education, public policy and Australian identity.

The Australasian Union of Jewish Students

The oration is a project of the Australasian Union of Jewish Students.

AUJS is the representative body of Jewish students in Australia and New Zealand – representing thousands of students on more than 25 university campuses. AUJS organises engaging social, educational and political events on and off campus, runs a number of international programs, and provides students with useful resources and other support services.
Sir Zelman Cowen was a distinguished educator, legal scholar, public intellectual, and Australia’s 19th Governor-General.

He graduated from the University of Melbourne with first class honours in arts and law, receiving the Supreme Court Prize in 1940. He was subsequently elected as a Rhodes scholar to study at Oxford University, and deferred his scholarship to serve in the Royal Australian Navy in World War II.

He graduated from Oxford University with first class honours in civil law in 1947.

Sir Zelman’s service in the higher education sector included appointment as lecturer at Oxford University, fellow at Oriel College, Dean of the University of Melbourne Law School at age 31, Vice Chancellor at the University of New England and then Vice Chancellor at the University of Queensland.

Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser appointed Sir Zelman as Governor-General in 1977.

Sir Zelman’s time as Governor-General, together with Lady Cowen, has been credited as delivering a touch of healing for the benefit of the nation.
Robert French was appointed Chief Justice of the High Court of Australia in 2008. At the time of his appointment he was a judge of the Federal Court of Australia, having been appointed to that office in November 1986.

He graduated from the University of Western Australia in science and law. He was admitted in 1972 and practised as a barrister and solicitor in Western Australia until 1983 when he went to the Western Australian Bar. From 1994 to 1998 he was President of the National Native Title Tribunal. At the time of his appointment he was an additional member of the Supreme Court of the Australian Capital Territory and a member of the Supreme Court of Fiji. He was also a Deputy President of the Australian Competition Tribunal and a part-time member of the Australian Law Reform Commission. From 2001 to January 2005 he was President of the Australian Association of Constitutional Law.

Chief Justice French was appointed a Companion in the General Division of the Order of Australia in 2010.
The Sir Zelman Cowen Memorial Oration

I congratulate the Australasian Union of Jewish Students on establishing the Sir Zelman Cowen Memorial Oration.

Sir Zelman was a giant in the Australian community.

His remarkable achievements as a legal scholar, educator and ultimately as the 19th Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia, are admired by many. Sir Zelman combined his high intellect with genuine compassion for his fellow citizens and a deep sense of civic service.

In light of his lifelong commitment to, and involvement with, the Jewish community, and his leadership in the Australian education sector, it is only appropriate that his memory be perpetuated by this oration in his name.

I am proud to be associated with the Sir Zelman Cowen Memorial Oration as its patron, and look forward to it becoming a highly anticipated and significant event on the annual speaking calendar.

The Hon Josh Frydenberg MP
I am delighted to provide my support to the inaugural Sir Zelman Cowen Memorial Oration, initiated by the Australasian Union of Jewish Students.

Sir Zelman Cowen was one of the most eminent legal scholars of his generation. He is remembered for distinguished service to law and academia, as well as the healing qualities he brought to his governor-generalship.

This Oration honours Australia’s 19th Governor-General, and is an opportunity to reflect on Sir Zelman’s life work to strengthen our nation and its institutions.

It is a fitting tribute to an Australian who gave the highest public service.

 signature
MESSAGE FROM THE PRIME MINISTER

AUSTRALASIAN UNION OF JEWISH STUDENTS
INAUGURAL SIR ZELMAN COWEN MEMORIAL ORATION

I am pleased to provide this message for the inaugural Sir Zelman Cowen Memorial Oration.

The Oration honours the memory of one of the greatest leaders and brightest intellects in our country’s history.

A man of great integrity, generosity and humility, Sir Zelman was a fine naval officer, a distinguished legal scholar and an accomplished educator.

He saw himself as a servant of the Australian people, and as Governor-General brought a vital touch of healing during his time as the Crown’s representative.

He loved his country and his family, and was proud of his Jewish faith.

He was truly great and he was truly good, and our country is deeply in his debt.

Sir Zelman retained a passion for the law throughout his life so it is fitting that the Chief Justice of the High Court, the Hon Robert French AC, will deliver the inaugural Oration.

The Oration celebrates the legacy of a man who gave a lifetime’s devotion to his country, and I commend the Australasian Union of Jewish Students on its launch.

The Hon Tony Abbott MP
Prime Minister of Australia
THE HON BILL SHORTEN MP
LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION
MEMBER FOR MARIBYRNONG

INAUGURAL SIR ZELMAN COWEN MEMORIAL LECTURE

It gives me great pleasure to extend my best wishes to the Australian Union of Jewish Students on the occasion of the inaugural Sir Zelman Cowen Memorial Lecture.

Sir Zelman dedicated his life to community service and rose to a number of eminent leadership positions. His brilliance was evident early in life when he graduated dux of Scotch College Melbourne and was later awarded the Supreme Court Prize as the top graduate of the Melbourne University Law School. Sir Zelman forewent a Rhodes Scholarship to serve his country in War, and afterwards pursued a distinguished career in academia.

Perhaps Sir Zelman’s most important act of leadership came in 1977 when he accepted Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser’s invitation to serve as Governor-General. After the turbulence surrounding Sir John Kerr’s dismissal of the democratically-elected Whitlam Government in 1975, provoking questions about the legitimacy of the Governor-General and causing much bitterness and acrimony, Sir Zelman restored respect to that office and helped an injured nation to heal.

Sir Zelman provides a fine example for the Australian Union of Jewish Students as you explore issues such as leadership, community service, justice and public policy, which are vital to Australia’s future.

On behalf of the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party, I congratulate you on the establishment of the Sir Zelman Cowen Memorial Lecture, and wish you all the best for the inaugural event.

Yours sincerely

Bill Shorten
Leader of the Opposition
Herbert Smith Freehills is a leading corporate law firm and employer with 23 offices across the world. Our reputation for delivering the highest quality work and client service is reflected in the firm being consistently engaged on the most complex and important matters for clients and recognised for many different professional and employer of choice awards.

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We also acknowledge the following oration partners and sponsors for their support:

» Monash University
» Geoff Nixon Real Estate
» Biggin & Scott Elsternwick
» Gary Peer
Thank you

AUJS is grateful to Lady Anna Cowen AM and the Honourable Josh Frydenberg MP for their support of the Sir Zelman Cowen Memorial Oration. We extend our sincere gratitude to Chief Justice the Honourable Robert French AC for delivering the inaugural oration.

If you would like to support the Sir Zelman Cowen Memorial Oration and AUJS’s other leadership, educational and social activities, please visit the AUJS website at www.aujs.com.au and contact Michael Fisher at michaelf@aujs.com.au.

2015 Oration committee

Daniel Nash          Oration Chair
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With thanks to Dean Sherr, Jenna Shneier, Julian Kowal and Lexi Kowal.