

Foreign Minister – DFAT Estimates – Opening Statement

Chair, Senators, good morning.

We meet almost two months after the 14th of December 2025.

A day when Islamist-inspired terror came to Australia's shores.

An antisemitic attack - and the deadliest terrorist attack in our nation's history.

Murdering 15 innocents, and injuring dozens more. Men, women and children.

An attack on a community and on our nation – on every Australian.

And our hearts break for the families and loved ones of those who were killed, and for the communities so deeply affected.

And we say again to the Australian Jewish community that the Australian Government stands with you.

And that there is no place for antisemitism or hate in this country.

Colleagues, I spoke earlier this week in PM&C Estimates about the Government's responses to the Bondi massacre and about our commitment to combatting antisemitism.

But I did want today to take the opportunity to update the Committee on the international response to this devastating event.

The shock and grief from this terror attack have been felt around the world – and I have had many calls and messages from my counterparts who have reached out in horror and heartbreak at this attack on Australia.

And I want to put on record my gratitude on behalf of our country to my counterparts who have been in touch offering solidarity, compassion and their thoughts to Jewish Australians – and to all Australians.

In the weeks following the attack, I spoke to my counterparts from Israel, Canada, India, Japan, New Zealand, the Philippines, Slovakia, South Africa, Ukraine, the United Kingdom and the United States.

We worked on the consular response, and with other agencies and our overseas partners on the counter-terrorism response.

We also worked to facilitate the return of Gefen Bitton – one of the heroes of Bondi – to Israel for medical treatment.

Can I place on record my thanks to officials of the Department who worked through the Christmas period in order to ensure that the Government's response was supported.

We have this week welcomed Israel's President Herzog to Australia – to comfort those in the Jewish Australian community grieving, and as an opportunity to engage on long-term peace and security in the Middle East.

In addition to the humanitarian situation in Gaza, there have been a range of grave developments in the Middle East.

Since we last met in December, the Iranian regime has massacred thousands of Iranians whilst attacking and arresting many thousands more for participating in peaceful protest.

The regime has imposed nationwide internet and telecommunications blackouts, in an attempt to conceal the scale of its brutality.

Australia has imposed further sanctions on Iran to underscore our commitment to the people of Iran and our opposition to the regime's egregious campaign of oppression and destabilisation.

I again reiterate, we stand with the Iranian Australian community at this difficult time.

And we share their horror at the atrocities and we acknowledge the immense distress of those still not able to reach loved ones to confirm their welfare.

The people of Afghanistan are enduring one of the world's worst protracted humanitarian crises, exacerbated by the Taliban's oppression of its own people and failure to meet basic needs.

Together with the Minister for International Development, Anne Aly, we have announced further humanitarian support focused on women and girls, prioritising food security, health services and the protection of dignity, safety and rights.

This is a package that will be delivered by trusted agencies including the World Food Programme and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs' Afghanistan Humanitarian

Fund. This is to ensure that funding does not go to nor benefit the Taliban.

It follows the establishment, by the Government, of an autonomous sanctions framework for Afghanistan, as part of our ongoing efforts to hold the Taliban to account.

Globally, Australia will continue to make our contribution. We will do this as part of multilateral efforts, to protect civilians, provide humanitarian assistance and uphold international law and human rights.

And we do this because we believe that living in peace should not be contingent upon where you were born.

But as this Committee is well aware, the world is only becoming more challenging – we approach the fourth year of Russia's illegal and immoral invasion of Ukraine.

We have long known that Australia cannot rely on old assumptions.

Since we came to office, the Government has been working to make Australia more secure in a much less predictable world.

At the heart of that effort is diversifying our relationships, with what I have called amplified middle power diplomacy.

For more than three years, we've been pursuing new alignments and maximising how we work with others, to better promote and protect our national interests.

Middle powers must keep working together for a world where no country dominates, and no country is dominated.

Logically, this effort must be focused on our region - where Australia's interests are most at stake.

Our overriding responsibility as a middle power of the Indo-Pacific is to support peace, stability and prosperity in our region.

And the Government continues to focus on our region, and on our relationships.

Since the last time we met here, I have travelled to Indonesia with the Prime Minister, to sign the historic Australia-Indonesia

Treaty on Common Security—known as the Jakarta Treaty 2026—taking the close cooperation between our countries to a new level.

And I acknowledge and thank President Prabowo and Foreign Minister Sugiono for their partnership and for their gracious hospitality.

I made my third visit to Washington of 2025, where the Deputy Prime Minister and I participated in the AUSMIN meetings with Secretaries Rubio and Hegseth.

Further, during his visit to Timor-Leste in January, the Prime Minister signed with Prime Minister Gusmão our groundbreaking '*Parseria*' joint declaration, establishing a new partnership for a new era.

And we have been so pleased to welcome to Australia, the President and Foreign Minister of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the President of Palau, the Prime Ministers of Solomon Islands and Tonga, the Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum and the Foreign Minister of Germany.

All of these efforts are directed towards our guiding purpose - to help assure the region we want.

A region in balance, in which sovereignty is respected.

A region that is peaceful, stable and prosperous, where countries large and small have the freedom to decide their futures.

And I want to acknowledge the remarkable work of Secretary Adams and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and all its officers here and in the network around the world, for their efforts in supporting Australia's place in the world.

Finally, Chair, I want to update the Committee in relation to the heartbreaking deaths of Holly Bowles and Bianca Jones by methanol poisoning in Laos.

Holly and Bianca should be with us today. They should be looking back on a trip full of wonderful memories. But they are not and our hearts go out to their loved ones and to their friends.

Instead, they are still mourning a terrible loss. And recent events have added to their heartbreak.

Since their deaths, I have been clear with the Lao authorities of the need for transparency and accountability.

And we have consistently conveyed our expectations that charges should reflect the seriousness of the tragedy that killed Holly, Bianca and four other foreign nationals.

And we will continue to do so.

To that end, this week I have appointed Mr Pablo Kang as Special Envoy, to continue our efforts for progress in the investigation of the deaths of these young Australians.

And he will depart for Laos as soon as possible this week.

I thank the Committee and I look forward to our discussion.