

Senate Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade Legislation Committee

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Secretary Jan Adams AO PSM

Supplementary Budget Estimates

7 November 2024

Opening Statement

Thank you for the opportunity to make this statement.

Senators, the period since last estimates has been a very busy one for DFAT.

The Department continues to lead the crisis response to Lebanon. To date, we have assisted more than 3,400 people to depart Lebanon on assisted departure flights.

We remain deeply concerned by the escalation in Lebanon, and we recognise the humanitarian situation in Gaza is catastrophic.

We continue to call for immediate ceasefires in Gaza and Lebanon, the release of all hostages, the protection of civilians, for increased humanitarian access and for the safety of humanitarian workers.

Indeed, at the UN General Assembly High Level Week [*in September*], the Foreign Minister convened a new Ministerial Group to pursue a Declaration for

the Protection of Humanitarian Personnel – a commitment to protect aid workers in places such as Gaza, Sudan, Ukraine, and in all and future conflicts.

The Foreign Minister also launched Australia's new humanitarian policy on 15 October.

In the Pacific, thanks to our diplomacy in lockstep with the AFP, Pacific Islands Forum leaders endorsed the Pacific Policing Initiative, a Pacific-led, Australia-backed initiative that was on display with its 11-country police deployment to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Samoa last month.

We secured entry into force of the landmark Australia-Tuvalu Falepili Union Treaty.

And together with Home Affairs, DFAT completed the inaugural ballot process for the Pacific Engagement Visa, which had over 56,000 primary applicants for 3,000 visas.

On trade, as Senators know, it is very difficult to secure new trade rules at the WTO.

So, I am particularly proud of DFAT's work in leading a process, alongside Japan and Singapore, to craft a new Agreement on Electronic Commerce.

This Agreement is a major achievement. Digital trade is worth an estimated US\$5 trillion. The next step will be to embed those rules in the WTO.

I am also pleased that yesterday [6 November], we signed the Australia-UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement, or CEPA, our first trade agreement in the Middle East region. CEPA will deliver 99 per cent tariff elimination upon full implementation.

Strategically, our diplomatic work with regional partners to secure a stable, peaceful and prosperous region continues apace.

This week, we welcomed India's External Affairs Minister Jaishankar, who arrived from Brisbane where he opened a new Consulate-General, India's fifth diplomatic post in Australia.

Across Southeast Asia, we are implementing *Invested: Australia's Southeast Asia Economic Strategy to 2040*, with the Prime Minister launching on the margins of the ASEAN Summits in Laos [11 October] the 'Advancing Implementation' publication – which is an outline of the significant progress we've made.

We will also continue to work closely with the United States to build on our longstanding Alliance relationship.

Our efforts to conduct a stable relationship with China continue to yield results across the breadth of our economic and security interests.

Finally, I want to address the deeply concerning findings of the ANAO audit on procurement within the Australian Passport Office.

The Department has accepted all seven of the ANAO's recommendations.

The audit identified serious issues in our procurement processes, decision making and raised integrity concerns, which we are investigating.

The Department is already strengthening procurement oversight, assurance and literacy, building on work initiated in the APO before the ANAO audit began, and applying this across the Department.

I have made clear to all staff, particularly our SES leaders, they must ensure the Department meets the highest standards of integrity and conduct.

The Department takes these matters seriously, as I know the Committee does.

We will answer the Committee's questions to the fullest extent possible, taking care to ensure we do not prejudice the processes we have underway to identify and address misconduct integrity.

Chair, I am confident the Department will rise to all of these challenges.

Thank you.