

## **DFAT ESTIMATES OPENING STATEMENT**

Thank you Chair, thank you to the committee.

And I welcome the opportunity to appear before this committee for the first time this term.

And being appointed as Australia's Foreign Minister for the second time is an honour and a privilege.

A particular honour to be a part of a re-elected Albanese Labor Government, which has been entrusted to keep building Australia's future.

To secure Australia's place in the world and to keep Australians safe.

Chair, we know these are extraordinary times, and our work as a government comes against a backdrop of challenges on an unprecedented scale.

But we also see opportunities.

I am confident in Australia.

I am confident in Australians.

And I am confident in our ability to work together to protect the security, stability, and prosperity of our nation.

We know that to do that we must shape the region we want. A region that is open and peaceful.

And to do this demands an application of our national power, working across all arms of statecraft.

We have demonstrated our approach over the last term, and we have continued to deliver for Australians since the election.

In just the past few months, I have represented Australia at the Pacific Islands Forum in Fiji, ASEAN-related meetings in Kuala Lumpur, at the Quad Foreign Ministers meetings in the United States, as well as visits across the Pacific and to Indonesia, Vietnam, and Japan.

I have welcomed foreign leaders and ministers to Australia, including from Singapore, India, the UK, Fiji, Tonga, Indonesia and Malaysia.

And as a member of the Pacific family, we celebrated the 50th anniversary of Papua New Guinea's independence.

And it is a great honour that our nearest neighbour is our newest ally. Australia's first in more than 70 years, and Papua New Guinea's first with any country.

At the United Nations last month, I launched a new Declaration for the Protection of Humanitarian Personnel, where more than 100 countries joined Australia in our call to protect aid workers in conflict zones.

Chair this was a truly moving event, and I thank all the DFAT officers who were involved in bringing it to fruition. More than 40 ministers, from all over the world, standing with Australia and honouring aid workers, including Australian Zomi Frankcom.

It was a reminder that so many nations – from Sierra Leone to Japan – still believe that the rules matter.

They still believe in multilateralism. And they understand that the rules that protect us, also need to be protected.

This government knows that prioritising our region, investing in our relationships, and safeguarding the rules is how Australia can uphold our values and deliver on our interests.

And how we can find collective solutions to our shared challenges.

Climate change is leading to more disasters. Extreme weather is threatening food and water security. And our region is more vulnerable than most to this threat – which is why Australia is partnering with the Pacific in our bid to host COP31.

Since the last time this Committee met, there has been great uncertainty in development funding, with the full impact of global aid cuts not yet known.

Our response to the reduction of funding has been to pivot and reprioritise, ensuring we respond to the most acute needs in our region.

And these needs are only compounded by the rise of conflict and instability worldwide.

I spoke at Estimates earlier this week, two years after the atrocities on October 7th, of the pain and terror inflicted by Hamas, and the agony of waiting for the hostages to be released.

I spoke about our commitment to two states – Israel and Palestine – living in peace, with prosperity and security for their people.

Australia has consistently been part of international calls for a ceasefire, for the return of the hostages, and the unimpeded flow of aid to Gaza.

On the 21st of September, together with the United Kingdom and Canada, Australia recognised Palestine, part of our contribution to building historic global momentum to break the cycle of violence in the Middle East.

Today we again congratulate President Trump for securing the agreement of Israel and Hamas to the first phase of his peace plan.

And we look forward to the favourable consideration today by the Israeli Cabinet.

American leadership has always been central to the prospect of peace, as have the regional players including the Arab League.

And we want to acknowledge in particular the persistent efforts of Egypt, Qatar and Türkiye over nearly two years.

Chair the pain and suffering in Gaza is beyond comprehension.

With agreement, there is the chance that hope may overcome despair.

The chance of a future for Palestinian children that looks nothing like their reality today.

There is the anticipation of relief, that the hostages can be reunited with their loved ones.

And we call on all parties to respect the terms of the plan.

I wish to acknowledge the many DFAT teams working on the Middle East for their efforts over the past two years, including the consular, humanitarian and sanctions areas and the posts in the region.

Australians were appalled by confirmation that the Iranian government had directed antisemitic attacks on Australian soil – dangerous interference which could not be tolerated.

As the Committee would be aware, the Government expelled Iran's Ambassador - the first time Australia has done so in the post-war period. I also made the decision to withdraw our Ambassador from Tehran.

I want to publicly acknowledge the perseverance and fortitude of our officials posted to Iran, and their families.

I want to close by thanking my Secretary and my department – all of the staff here and throughout the world at our posts – for their work they do everyday to serve Australians.

Thank you Chair.