

ADDITIONAL ESTIMATES FM OPENING STATEMENT

I thank the Chair and the Committee.

I want to begin by briefly updating Senators on our international engagements.

The Committee will be familiar with my travel as Foreign Minister – visiting some 37 countries, including 9 more than once.

In the first half of this year, we are focused on bringing the world to Australia.

We have already this month we have already had visits by foreign and defence ministers from New Zealand and last week we had the Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea address the Australian Parliament.

Over the weekend in Perth, I hosted the Indian Ocean Conference, attended by the President of Sri Lanka, and ministers from Bangladesh, Comoros, India, Japan, Madagascar, Maldives, Mauritius, Mozambique, Nepal, Seychelles, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Timor-Leste, Tonga, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom and Vietnam.

And next month, the Prime Minister hosts Southeast Asian leaders at the ASEAN-Australia Special Summit in Melbourne.

Speaking of Southeast Asia, I wish to congratulate Indonesia on the successful conduct of its election yesterday.

While the formal count is continuing, early results indicate that Prabowo Subianto is well ahead.

Whoever the Indonesian people have chosen, we look forward to working closely with the next president when he is inaugurated in October.

As our Prime Minister has said, “there is no more important relationship than the relationship between our two great nations.”

Last week we were all appalled and outraged by the suspended death sentence received by Australian citizen, Dr Yang Jun, in Beijing.

The Australian Government has conveyed our objections to the Chinese Government at senior levels.

All Australians want to see Dr Yang reunited with his family. We will continue with and persist in our advocacy.

And through the dialogue we have rebuilt, we will pursue the full range of our national interests in our engagement with China.

Turning now to the Middle East. In my recent travel to the Middle East reinforced that Australia is a respected voice, even if we are not a central player in that region.

And the Government is using Australia's voice to advocate for a pathway out of this conflict and an immediate humanitarian ceasefire.

We want to see the release of hostages, the upholding of international law and protection of civilians.

The humanitarian crisis in Gaza is dire and getting worse.

The linchpin of humanitarian support there is UNRWA. It does life-saving work.

However, the recent allegations against UNRWA staff are serious and can't be ignored.

UNRWA's life-saving work is why Australian Governments - of both stripes - have provided funding to UNRWA since 1951.

Right now, nearly 1.7 million Palestinians are sheltering in UNRWA facilities, and thousands of its staff are involved in the humanitarian response in Gaza.

The need for this critical work to continue is why Australia welcomed UNRWA's swift response to recent allegations, including terminating staff and launching an investigation and a broader independent review.

Australia is now working with a number of other major contributors to make clear to UNRWA it needs to demonstrate strong, transparent and accountable leadership for the international community to move forward together.

While this work is being done, Australia and 14 other countries including Canada, Japan, the Netherlands and Sweden are temporarily pausing funding.

For Australia, this means the recently announced \$6 million in additional funding for UNRWA has been temporarily paused.

I want to emphasise, this does not affect Australia's annual core funding of \$20.6 million – core funding that was doubled by this Government, and which has already been provided for this financial year.

Since the beginning of this conflict Australia has committed \$46.5 million in humanitarian assistance. This full amount will be delivered.

Finally, I wish to restate the Australian Government's grave concerns about an impending major Israeli ground offensive in Rafah.

This would bring further devastation to more than a million civilians seeking shelter in Rafah, many there by Israel's direction.

Large scale military operations in densely populated areas risk extensive civilian casualties.

Australia believes this would be unjustifiable.

Our message to Israel is listen to the world. Do not go down this path.

Thank you.