

## **OPENING STATEMENT – 2024-25 BUDGET ESTIMATES**

**SENATOR THE HONOURABLE PENNY WONG**

**MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

**3 JUNE 2024**

Thank you, Chair.

Can I start also by remembering Senator Linda White. She was a woman of incisive intellect and deep principle and we miss her.

I begin by again conveying Australia's deepest condolences to the Government and people of Papua New Guinea.

Our countries are the closest of neighbours and the best of friends.

Australia remains ready to add to our initial response of \$2.5 million in humanitarian assistance, including emergency relief supplies, logistical support from the Australian Defence Force, and expertise on geohazards to inform early recovery efforts.

Senators, since the last Estimates, Australia has hosted a number of international guests.

Leaders from across Southeast Asia for the ASEAN-Australia Special Summit, and we were grateful that all leaders from the ASEAN region were gracious enough to attend.

We have hosted the Foreign and Defence Ministers of Japan, the United Kingdom and the Republic of Korea, and the Foreign Minister of Germany.

I have also visited Bangladesh, including Cox's Bazar and Singapore.

In Tuvalu we took forward our shared vision for the Falepili Union, on a bipartisan visit with Senator Birmingham. I thank him for his engagement.

These engagements have all been grounded in fundamental strategic and diplomatic priorities for Australia.

At a time of increasing global uncertainty, facing conflict in Europe and the Middle East, and the risk of conflict closer to home, we must do everything we can to preserve peace.

And we want a peace that enables Australia and other countries to have the freedom to decide our own futures, without interference.

We want each country – large or small – to operate by the same rules.

And when disputes inevitably arise, which they will, we want them managed according to the rules, and by talking and cooperation, not by force, threat of force or raw power.

This doesn't happen on its own. We help make it happen. Including by upholding international law, whether it be the Law of the Sea or humanitarian law.

We do nothing to help make it happen by recklessly threatening to pull out of the bodies that uphold international law.

That kind of talk might sound tough, but it undermines Australia's core security interests.

For example, we cannot insist China abides by international legal decisions in the South China Sea, but threaten to pull out of the International Criminal Court.

We do nothing to shape the kind of region Australia needs by picking fights, blowing up relationships, or beating the drums of war.

We do help making it happen by rebuilding and stabilising relationships – with mature, calm, consistent engagement.

By combining all the elements of our national power to advance Australia's interests in the world.

The new concept of National Defence, underpinning the inaugural National Defence Strategy, comprehends that as we seek to maintain peace in our region, our nation's front line is diplomacy.

It is the men and women behind me and those who operate in our posts across the world.

And they and their work, is underwritten by our military capability.

Diplomacy frames the calculus that each country faces.

It signals intent, credibility and even red lines.

The Secretary Adams can provide more detail to Senators on the work we have done to strengthen the diplomatic network.

Senators, as tensions increase around the world, it is a time for Australia's political leaders to work together to protect Australia's character.

We are a pluralist nation, we welcome different races, religions and views, united by respect for each other's humanity and for each other's right to live in peace.

All of us, everyone here, has a higher responsibility to protect that, but too many in this building are prepared to exploit differences in our community for their political advantage.

Spreading false information in an attempt to incite conflict here - to reproduce the conflict here.

Remember, our actions have consequences.

I have previously said, it is not ok for anyone, much less someone who claims to be a leader, to blame people in Australia for what is happening overseas.

We all understand, the situation in Gaza is catastrophic.

What we have seen in Rafah underlines why Australia and the international community have been united in opposition.

The death and destruction is horrific. This human suffering is unacceptable.

We reiterate to the Netanyahu Government: This cannot continue.

We must see an immediate humanitarian ceasefire so that civilians can be protected.

Hamas must release hostages. Israel must allow aid to flow at scale, as directed by the ICJ.

And so we welcome the current ceasefire proposal from President Biden and we urge parties to agree to its terms.

Thank you.