

OPENING STATEMENT – 2024-25 SUPPLEMENTARY BUDGET ESTIMATES

SENATOR THE HONOURABLE PENNY WONG

MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS

7 NOVEMBER 2024

Thank you, Chair.

First, I would like to congratulate Donald Trump on his election as President of the United States.

The alliance between Australia and the US has endured for generations, since John Curtin's turn to America during the dark days of World War Two.

An alliance grounded in history, shaped by friendship and driven by shared interests.

Our Government will work closely with the new administration to realise the benefits of our strong economic partnership.

We will strive to strengthen the co-operation between our two nations in our region.

The Australian Government has been working to ensure we are ready for whatever the American people decided.

Our preparations have included engagement with many key Republicans by the Prime Minister, Defence Minister, our embassy in Washington – and my own engagement.

We look forward to working with the Trump Administration in the best interests of both our nations.

Chair, Senators will have heard me say we face a world that is more uncertain and less stable than since the end of World War Two.

There is now more conflict than any time since World War Two. Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Sudan. Myanmar. Yemen. Gaza and Lebanon.

We recently marked the first anniversary of the terrorist attack by Hamas on October 7.

Many Australians are understandably traumatised by the past year in the Middle East.

Every day we see more unbearable scenes.

I understand people want their government to make this war end.

But this isn't Vietnam, it isn't Iraq – Australia is not contributing to the war. Nor are we supplying weapons for it.

On our own, Australia has few ways to move the dial in the Middle East.

That's why we are so focused on partnering with other countries which also want to end this war, deliver lifesaving aid, and uphold international law.

It is some eleven months since Australia voted for a ceasefire with 152 other countries at the United Nations General Assembly.

As the conflict has spread to Lebanon, we called for a ceasefire alongside dozens of others including the European Union and regional leaders Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Qatar.

As well as our coordinated calls for ceasefire and the release of hostages, we act in partnership with other aid donors to help civilians devastated by this conflict.

The scale of humanitarian need cannot be met by one country alone.

Since 7 October, we have committed \$94.5 million in humanitarian assistance to support civilians impacted by conflicts in Gaza, in Lebanon and to respond to the refugee crisis in the region worsened by those conflicts.

At the recent United Nations General Assembly in New York, I convened an influential group of countries to pursue a global Declaration for the Protection of Humanitarian Personnel, increasing pressure for countries to abide by international humanitarian law.

Australia works with Canada, New Zealand and other supporters of international law, including by backing the independence of the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court.

International law includes the UN Charter that allows countries to defend themselves – and the Geneva Conventions that protect civilians during war. Palestinian civilians cannot pay the price of defeating Hamas.

We work with others because going it alone gets us nowhere in the Middle East.

This includes sanctions. When Australia applies sanctions, we coordinate with partners. This is what makes them effective.

We have coordinated with other countries to sanction Israeli extremist settlers for their violence against Palestinians in the West Bank.

Just as Australia has joined a large number of countries in condemning and sanctioning Hamas, Hizballah and others for their terrorism.

Ultimately, I hope all of us want the Middle East cycle of violence to stop.

That can only happen when the promise of two states is fulfilled – a Palestinian state and the State of Israel, living side by side in peace and security within internationally recognised borders.

We will continue working with the international community to press toward this goal.

In our own region, Australia can have more direct impact, and the Albanese Government continues to deploy all levers of national power to protect and promote Australia's interests and values.

Continuing to rebuild trusting relationships.

Continuing to strengthen our engagement in the Pacific.

In August, we stood side by side with Pacific leaders to announce a Pacific-led, Australia backed Pacific Policing Initiative.

We established the ASEAN-Australia Centre and signed the Defence Cooperation Agreement with Indonesia.

We continue to implement the Southeast Asia Economic Strategy – with the investment financing facility up and running and the development of a pipeline of projects to boost Australian investment in Southeast Asia.

Our diversification agenda was further boosted this week by the signing of the Australia-UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement.

And we continue to stabilise our relationship with China and see trade resume for our farmers, growers and winemakers.

At the same time of all these gains in Australia's interests, we continue to make progress in promoting our values.

We joined with Germany, Canada and the Netherlands in taking unprecedented action to hold Afghanistan to account under international law for the Taliban's treatment of women and girls.

And we have launched Australia's Humanitarian Policy.

I look forward to answering questions from the Committee.