

## **Australia's Contribution to the Middle East Peace Process**

- 3.1 This Chapter examines the Middle East peace process (MEPP) in the context of Australia's contribution to the international community's search for a solution to the conflict. Australia has played an acknowledged role in several multilateral forums, most notably in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) and two working groups established by the Madrid and Oslo peace processes—the Arms Control and Regional Security Working Group and the Water Resources Working Group.
- 3.2 In addition, Australia maintains regular bilateral contact through senior level political and trade visits to the region and direct representations to regional leaders from time to time on particular issues. In August 2000, the Foreign Minister announced that the Australian Government would open a representative office in the West Bank city of Ramallah.<sup>1</sup>
- 3.3 Australia has contributed to the MEPP through involvement in areas where its special expertise can make a positive difference, and through targeted development assistance.<sup>2</sup> Australia's overseas aid program in the Middle East is administered by the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID). The prime focus of the program is assistance to Palestinians in the Occupied Territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, as well as to refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. Most aid funding is provided in the form of assistance for the work of the UN's Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Significant funding is also provided to Australian non-government organisations (NGOs) for humanitarian, poverty-alleviation and institution-building projects. Australia's contribution to Middle East

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1 Hon Alexander Downer MP, Media Release FA94, 23 August 2000.

2 DFAT, Submission, p. 966.

peace through the overseas aid program is explained more fully in Chapter 10 of this report,

## The Outlook for Peace

### 3.4 Optimism about the outlook for the wider Middle East peace process in mid-2000 was summarised by DFAT in the following terms:

Despite periodic concerns about the outlook for the peace process, and even with occasional reversion to conditions of bilateral and regional tension, instability or emergency, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is drawing to an end. In the [Persian] Gulf, the overarching assurance of continuing high levels of US and British military commitment to the region, and closer cooperation between Iran and Saudi Arabia, is having an important stabilising effect ... despite ... unresolved problems in certain areas, including territorial and border disputes and, of course, the uncertainty surrounding the future of Iraq's regional role.<sup>3</sup>

### 3.5 As discussed in Chapter 2, the most complex and contentious issues in the Israeli-Palestinian context are still to be resolved. Those issues were highlighted at least as long ago as the Declaration of Principles of September 1993:

- The future of Jerusalem
- Israeli settlements
- Palestinian refugees (particularly those in Lebanon)
- Final Palestinian borders and 'statehood'.

### 3.6 The Palestinian uprising which began in September 2000—the 'al-Aqsa Intifada'—signalled the virtual collapse of the Oslo Accords and the associated agreements facilitated in particular by the US and the EU. The principal agreements which had been signed since the Declaration of Principles in 1993 included:

- Israel-Jordan Common Agenda, 14 September 1993;
- Agreement on the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area, 4 May 1994;
- Washington Declaration (Israel-Jordan-US), 25 July 1994;

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3 DFAT, Submission, p. 963.

- Agreement on the Preparatory Transfer of Powers and Responsibilities (Israel-PLO), 29 August 1994;
- Treaty of Peace between Israel and Jordan, 26 October 1994;
- Interim Agreement between Israel and the Palestinians (Oslo 2), 28 September 1995;
- Final Statement (Sharm el-Sheikh) of 13 March 1996;
- Agreement on the Temporary International Presence in Hebron, of 21 January 1997;
- Wye River Memorandum, of 23 October 1998;
- Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum, of 4 September 1999;
- Protocol Concerning Safe Passage between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, of 5 October 1999; and
- Tri-level Statement on the Middle East Peace Summit at Camp David, of 25 July 2000.

3.7 Before the outbreak of renewed violence in the Occupied Territories and Israel in September 2000, the international community had cause to be encouraged that, at long last, the momentum towards peace in the Middle East appeared to be undeniable. In September 2000, DFAT described this momentum as a trend towards stabilisation (if not resolution) of regional tensions, particularly the Israeli-Palestinian conflict:

... while there will always be uncertainties ... the medium and long-term outlook is encouraging. The problem of predicting the course of events in the next few months, so far as Israel and the Palestinians is concerned, should not distract attention from the overall direction of regional developments and their positive implications for Australia. Our trade, economic and political links with the region are continuing to strengthen, our dialogue with key regional players continues to grow, and we remain a valued and respected interlocutor in a region whose horizons are expanding as it strives to achieve its full potential.<sup>4</sup>

3.8 As a result of uncertainties generated by the continuing violence and loss of life, particularly in the West Bank and Gaza, tangible progress since the above agreements were made has been negligible. The international community, while recognising that there is no real option but to continue

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4 DFAT, Transcript, pp. 349, 351.

to search for a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, has little cause to retain the level of optimism which prevailed in the first half of 2000.

- 3.9 Nevertheless, positive developments such as the commendable efforts of Egypt and Jordan earlier this year to formulate an agreed settlement, and the muted acceptance of both parties of at least parts of the Mitchell Commission's report on the uprising, have given some reason to hope that negotiations will resume and that armed conflict between Israelis and Palestinians can be halted. Following release of the report, President Bush announced on 22 May 2001 the appointment of a special envoy, the serving US Ambassador to Jordan, to lead a new attempt to end the violence and to bring the parties back to the negotiations.<sup>5</sup>

## The Australian Perspective

- 3.10 The 1997 White Paper on Australia's foreign and trade policy contained only the following brief assessment in relation to Australia's relations with the Middle East region:

In the Middle East, Australia has significant commercial interests and substantial prospects of increasing trade and investment links. In addition, political and strategic developments in this region will continue to affect Australia's trade interests and to engage its political concerns.<sup>6</sup>

- 3.11 While apparently emphasising a trade and investment focus, the above assessment does indicate the importance for Australia of political and strategic developments in the region. In evidence, DFAT indicated that although our interests in the Middle East are shaped by economic considerations, there is a range of political, strategic and human rights concerns of a global nature that impact on Australia's view of the Middle East.<sup>7</sup>
- 3.12 Support for international efforts to achieve a resolution of the Middle East conflict by securing the agreement of the parties involved has been a consistent theme of Australia's foreign policy. Most recently, this

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5 *The Australian*, 23 May 2001, p. 21. The US-led Commission reported its findings to the Israeli Government, the Palestinian Authority and the UN Secretary-General in May 2001. Soon after, Arafat called for a further summit at Sharm el-Sheikh to discuss the findings, which strongly criticised both sides.

6 Hon Alexander Downer MP and the Hon Tim Fischer MP, *In the National Interest: Australia's Foreign and Trade Policy*, August 1997, p. 68.

7 DFAT, Transcript, p. 15.

approach has been stated in response to the continuing violence which has erupted in the latest phase of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.<sup>8</sup> Prime Minister Howard said on 2 June 2001:

Australia joins other members of the international community in calling on all those concerned to recognise the devastating implications for both sides of a deepening cycle of provocation and retribution. The only solution is one arrived at through dialogue between the parties, in which terrorist violence plays no part.<sup>9</sup>

- 3.13 Since the Oslo process began in 1993, Australia has supported international efforts to achieve peace and security in the region, based on UN Security Council Resolutions 242, 338 and 425, the principle of 'land for peace' and the various agreements reached by Israel and the Palestinian negotiators. According to DFAT, the consistent position taken by the Australian Government since Oslo has been broadly acceptable to all the parties in the region. Those countries have not called upon Australia to take a higher profile in the search for an end to the conflict.<sup>10</sup>

### **Australia's geographic distance from the Middle East conflict**

- 3.14 The geographic distance between Australia and the Middle East region makes it difficult for the full ramifications of the current conflict to be understood in Australia. We are literally a long way away:

We do have influence, but it is largely an indirect influence. The contribution Australia can make is, firstly, to provide support to those parties who are most actively concerned to bring about a positive and constructive outcome to the negotiations. ... We are removed from the region geographically, historically, and, in many ways, culturally.<sup>11</sup>

- 3.15 Notwithstanding the presence in Australia of sizeable community groups with historical and other links with their homelands in the Middle East, Australia's relative position in the world and distance from the conflict means its ability to influence events in the Middle East region is, in practical terms, limited.<sup>12</sup> This does not mean, however, that Australia should become merely a silent or passive observer. Rather, as a

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8 Media Release, Hon Alexander Downer MP, FA117 of 13 October 2000, and AAP newswire report, 11 December 2000, Story No. 2995.

9 Media Release, Hon John Howard MP, 'Terrorist Bombing in Israel', 2 June 2001.

10 DFAT, Transcript, p. 15.

11 DFAT, Transcript, p. 352.

12 DFAT, Submission, p. 966; Peter Nugent MP, Transcript, p. 381

concerned, responsible and dispassionate member of the international community, Australia should make its views known in appropriate overseas and domestic forums.

## **Australia's voice in the Middle East region**

3.16 Australia is not a key player in the politics of the Middle East. As DFAT indicated in evidence:

We recognise the limits to Australia's influence on broader political and security issues in the region. We do not see Australia as a commentator on each and every regional development, good or bad. But conflict in the Middle East has both global and regional implications important to Australia and shape the environment in which Australian interests are pursued in the region and globally.<sup>13</sup>

3.17 In a supplementary submission, DFAT explained the mechanisms through which Australia is seeking to increase opportunities for dialogue on trade and other issues:

We are striving to enhance Australia's perceived relevance to decision-makers at government level and in business, using our diplomatic network, high-level visits and Joint Ministerial Commissions which draw together business and government activity for periodic review at ministerial level.<sup>14</sup>

3.18 In the Parliament, bipartisan support for the Arab-Israeli peace process and condemnation of the escalating violence on both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in particular has been expressed at regular intervals.

## **Australia as 'honest broker'**

3.19 Many countries in the region differentiate between perceptions of Australia as a trading partner and as a concerned observer of political developments in the Middle East. Australia has an extremely good reputation as a reliable and efficient trading partner, and this reputation gives Australia opportunities to protect our wider interests:

We must go to great lengths to preserve our reputation as a reliable trade partner, because it does ultimately protect our interests in a number of other ways.<sup>15</sup>

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13 DFAT, Submission, p. 2445 and Transcript, p. 3.

14 DFAT, Submission, p. 2445.

15 DFAT, Transcript, p. 10.

3.20 Is Australia 'even-handed' in its relations with the Arab nations and Israel? According to DFAT, our political position is 'broadly acceptable to all the players with whom we deal':

We are regarded as being well-disposed and sympathetic to the Palestinians' demands for self-determination—we have long supported that demand. The relationship with Israel is an extremely strong relationship, reflecting longstanding political connections, and there is no sign of that diminishing.<sup>16</sup>

3.21 While Australia is clearly committed to Israel's right to exist within secure and recognised borders, Australia also supports the Palestinians' right to self-determination and has not recognised the annexation by Israel of any areas beyond its 1967 frontiers. As a responsible member of the international community, Australia has expressed these views while at the same time emphasising the primacy of the bilateral negotiations between the parties themselves. As DFAT informed the Committee:

Australia has clear interests in the achievement of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East, in which Israel and other states may live in peace and security ... . We expect the precise shape of a Palestinian entity, including the option of a Palestinian state, the timing of its formation, and its relationship with Israel, will emerge from the bilateral negotiations.<sup>17</sup>

3.22 However, evidence received from the Palestinian and Arab communities, from some individuals and from Israeli support organisations in Australia, was at times very strongly opposed to the view that Australia's role in the Arab-Israeli conflict had been even handed. Accusations of bias were made in submissions and oral evidence from a number of sources—for example, Mr Ali Kazak, Head of the General Palestinian Delegation; Mr Asem Judeh, Deir Yassin Remembered Australia; Professor Amin Saikal, Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies at the Australian National University (ANU); and the Australian Arabic Council. In essence, these organisations and individuals were very critical of what they saw as Australia's unquestioning pro-Israel and pro-US stance in the context of the Middle East conflict.<sup>18</sup>

3.23 In contrast, the Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ) and the Australia/Israel and Jewish Affairs Council (AIJAC) considered

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16 *ibid.*

17 DFAT, Submission, p. 2445. See also Transcript, p. 352 and Submission p. 966.

18 For example, Mr Ali Kazak, General Palestinian Delegation, Submission, pp. 354-55; Australian Arabic Communities Council, Transcript, pp. 135-36; Mr R McGuire, Submission, pp. 907-13; and Professor Saikal, Submission pp. 485-86.

Australia's voting record at the UN to have been, by and large, positive and balanced in recent years.<sup>19</sup> Australia strongly supported Israel's admission as a full but temporary member of the Western European and Other States Group (WEOG) at the UN, which occurred in June 2000.

## Australia's Voting Record at the UN

3.24 In response to perceptions in some quarters of bias in Australia's approach to the Middle East conflict, DFAT was asked to provide information on Australia's recent voting record at the UN. In a supplementary submission, DFAT summarised Australia's record in the UNGA from 1995 to 1999 and at the 10<sup>th</sup> Emergency Special Session. Examination of the schedules shows that Australia abstained from all the votes in the Emergency Session<sup>20</sup> and either abstained or voted in favour of (never against) relevant resolutions in the General Assembly.<sup>21</sup>

3.25 As DFAT explained, the Government's approach has been to address the issues involved in each individual resolution that comes forward, and to decide its position on the merits of the particular issues:

[The Australian Government] does not support resolutions that are unbalanced, including in regard to Israel. It does not support resolutions that seek to introduce political criteria into what should be humanitarian instruments. But, at the same time, the Government also makes its position very clear on the substance of the issues involved.

For example, on settlements, the government has stated publicly that it considers settlements are contrary to international law and harmful to the peace process. Our voting record reflects those concerns. But ... we do not address the question of even-handedness between the two sides. What we do address is the merit of the particular resolution and the language in which it is cast.<sup>22</sup>

3.26 While the Committee recognises the purpose and value of Australia's periodical statements in the UN and elsewhere—in support of the peace negotiations, in condemnation of terrorism in all its forms and of violence

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19 AIJAC, Submission, pp. 751-59; ECAJ, Submission, pp. 551-53.

20 This Session considered 'Illegal Israeli actions in occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory'.

21 DFAT, Submission, pp. 2455-69.

22 DFAT, Transcript, p. 22.



on both sides—more could be done to give public voice to Australia's approach.<sup>23</sup> This is particularly important for informing all Middle East communities in Australia of the broad policy approach taken by Australia on the Middle East conflict in both multilateral and bilateral forums.

- 3.27 Mechanisms such as formal policy statements in the UNGA and in sessions of the WEOG provide an opportunity for Australia to support the efforts of the international community and to raise its own profile on behalf of the Middle Eastern communities living in Australia. The Committee noted that the latest occasion in which Australia made such a statement in relation to the Middle East was 30 November 1999. Since then, there have been significant developments in the region, both positive and negative. It would therefore be appropriate for further comprehensive statements to be made by Australia in the multilateral forums.
- 3.28 Given the length of time since Australia's last statement about the MEPP at the UN, the Australian Government should take opportunities much more frequently to express and explain Australia's stance on the Middle East conflict and the search for solutions. Such statements in the UNGA and the WEOG would provide a high-profile opportunity for Australia to publicise its not inconsiderable financial and other contributions to the search for lasting peace and stability in the Middle East.
- 3.29 At the time these policy statements are made at the UN, a corresponding statement should be made in Parliament by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, as the following Recommendation provides:

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23 See 'Australia's Statement on the Middle East to the 54<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN General Assembly', 30 November 1999, attached to DFAT's Submission, pp. 1056-60.

**Recommendation 1**

3.30 **The Committee recommends that the Australian Government:**

- **make comprehensive policy statements at much more frequent intervals in the UN General Assembly and the Western European and Other States Group, on developments in the Middle East;**
- **use those occasions to demonstrate Australia's contribution to international efforts for a just and lasting peace; and**
- **report to the Parliament each time statements on the Middle East are made in international forums.**

3.31 Bilaterally, the main avenues by which Australia's point of view on the Middle East conflict can be expressed are senior-level (and reciprocated) visits to the region by political leaders and official parliamentary delegations and through on-going representations from our overseas posts.

## **Friendship Delegations**

3.32 The Australian Parliamentary Delegation to Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Israel in June 1998 has been mentioned in Chapter 1. More recently, a bipartisan delegation of the NSW and Federal Branches of the Parliamentary Friends of Palestine visited Palestine, the UAE, Egypt and Jordan—in January 2000. There was also a delegation of the Australia-Israel Parliamentary Friendship Group to Israel in January 1999.

3.33 In a submission to the Committee, the leaders of the Parliamentary Friends of Palestine delegation made several observations and suggestions on the basis of their visit. In broad terms, the delegation was of the view that there are significant economic opportunities for Australia in the evolution of a Palestinian state. As well, the delegation highlighted the (then) lack of an Australian overseas post in Palestine, and criticised the

indefinite postponement of the Australian invitation to President Yasser Arafat to visit Australia.<sup>24</sup>

## Australian Representation in the Region

3.34 As DFAT explained, the level and disposition of Australia's representation in the Middle East—as in other regions of the world—is kept under review on a global basis rather than by closing one office in order to open another. This review is based upon an assessment of options for maximising impact on economic and political developments affecting Australia's interests:

That was the reason the Government decided to open an embassy in Abu Dhabi after one had been closed for some time. It was also at the heart of the decision to close the embassy in Syria. [Notwithstanding] the important role that Syria has as a force for regional stability and as a player in the peace process, greater weight was given to the need for our resources to be focused upon the economic potential of the Persian Gulf region. ... Damascus was a casualty of that revision of our priorities.<sup>25</sup>

The following table was compiled from information provided by DFAT in July 2000:

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24 Submission, pp. 123-29. See also Transcript, pp.285-293. The delegation included JSCFADT member, the Hon Janice Crosio MBE, MP.

25 DFAT, Transcript, pp. 8, 23.

Table 3.1 Australian Posts in the Middle East

Post	Date Opened	Ambassador or Chargé	Responsibilities
Abu Dhabi	May 1999	Ambassador	UAE, Qatar
Algiers	April 1976 (Embassy closed in March 1991)	Ambassador	Algeria
Amman	December 1978	Ambassador	Jordan, Iraq
Baghdad	September 1976 (Embassy operations suspended in January 1991)		
Beirut	February 1967 (Embassy operations suspended February 1984, re-opened July 1995)	Ambassador	Lebanon
Cairo	March 1950	Ambassador	Egypt, Sudan, Arab League, Algeria, Tunisia, Syria
Damascus	December 1977 (Embassy closed August 1999)	Ambassador	Syria
Riyadh	September 1984 (Embassy located in Jeddah 1975-84)	Ambassador	Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Yemen, Oman
Tehran	September 1968	Ambassador	Iran
Tel Aviv	December 1949	Ambassador	Israel, Palestinian Territories

Source DFAT, *Submission*, p. 2454, 7 July 2000.

## Australian Representative Office, Ramallah

- 3.35 To the above table should be added the Australian Representative Office in Ramallah, which was initially established in temporary premises on 6 September 2000. Australia is thus no longer the only significant overseas aid donor to the Palestinians without a representative office in the West Bank, Gaza or East Jerusalem. Although the staffing levels for the Ramallah office had not been finalised at the time of writing, the Committee was informed that the Ramallah resources would be additional to the staffing currently in Tel Aviv, with the exception of the AusAID representative, who would be transferred from there to Ramallah.<sup>26</sup>
- 3.36 The Committee welcomes the establishment of the Ramallah Office as a positive and practical step towards normalising relations with the Palestinian authorities. It was not clear, however, why the embassy in

<sup>26</sup> Hon Alexander Downer MP, Media Release, 23 August 2000; DFAT, Transcript, pp. 351, 354. The first Head of the Ramallah office, Mr S Pinhorn, commenced duty in November 2000.

Damascus had not been re-opened after its closure in August 1999. Developments in the Middle East conflict since then, and the new leadership in Syria, warrant further consideration of the need to restore full relations with Syria at this crucial time in the Middle East conflict. Indeed, Australia believed in 1999 that a renewed effort must be made to engage Syria and Lebanon in the negotiating process on the basis of the implementation of Security Council Resolutions 242, 338 and 425:

Australia believes that a lasting settlement can only be successful if the sovereignty of each of the parties is respected, where there are effective guarantees for Israel's security and where there is an outcome regarding the Golan Heights which is acceptable to both Syria and Israel.<sup>27</sup>

## Recommendation 2

- 3.37 **The Committee recommends that the Australian Government give further consideration to re-opening the Australian Embassy in Damascus, which was closed in August 1999.**
- 3.38 In relation to the overseas operations of Austrade, DFAT advised the Committee that trade representatives were stationed at the following Australian embassies: Israel (Tel Aviv), Lebanon (Beirut), Jordan (Amman), Egypt (Cairo), Iran (Tehran), Saudi Arabia (Riyadh) and the UAE (Dubai). Detailed discussion of Austrade's presence in the region is provided in Chapter 6 of this report.

## Location of foreign embassies in Israel

- 3.39 In 1949, Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion proclaimed (West) Jerusalem as the capital of the new state of Israel, but its status has not been recognised internationally apart from a few Latin American states. Almost all foreign embassies in Israel are located in Tel Aviv. Although the US Congress has passed the *Jerusalem Embassy Act 1995*, President Clinton repeatedly exercised his powers under the waiver provisions while in office, and President George W Bush has recently postponed any relocation from Tel Aviv for at least six months.<sup>28</sup>

27 Australia's Statement to the 54<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN General Assembly, 30 November 1999 (see Appendix 8 to DFAT Submission, p. 1057).

28 *Australian Financial Review*, 13 June 2001, p. 9.

- 3.40 The UNGA has expressed support for Security Council Resolution 478 of 20 August 1980, which strongly censured Israel's passage of the 'Basic Law' on Jerusalem and other actions designed to alter the status of Jerusalem.<sup>29</sup>
- 3.41 In the aftermath of the 'al-Aqsa Intifada', the Arab League threatened to sever ties with any country which recognised Jerusalem as the capital of Israel or decided to move its embassy there from Tel Aviv.<sup>30</sup>
- 3.42 Australia has consistently indicated since the beginning of the Oslo process that it is willing to support any agreement reached by the parties to the dispute which respects and reflects the traditional character of Jerusalem and the aspirations of its diverse population.

### Australia's consular services

- 3.43 The consular services provided to Australians residing and travelling in the region by DFAT's offices overseas and the network of honorary consuls were outlined in an appendix to the Department's primary submission:

The Middle East is a region where the number of consular cases may appear relatively low, but where cases—when they occur—can be extremely difficult to handle and resolve. Legal systems are mostly based on Islamic law and are very different from Australia's: the security apparatus and police are sometimes not publicly accountable, and social attitudes to women and family matters differ greatly from the majority Australian attitude.<sup>31</sup>

- 3.44 Because of problems which have occurred with child abduction cases, Attorney-General's Department has negotiated bilateral agreements with Lebanon and Egypt, which provide for consultations between relevant authorities when difficult cases occur.<sup>32</sup>
- 3.45 Without any particular reference to the Middle East region, the Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) reported in 2001 that most aspects of consular services are satisfactorily administered by DFAT. There have been improvements in the provision of services in recent years, particularly in terms of improved accessibility. The ANAO also found that DFAT had increased the number and coverage of the travel advisories and information brochures issued to the public, as well as increased the

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29 See Ong, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

30 AAP newswire (story nos. 2761 and 2865), 28 and 29 March 2001, respectively.

31 DFAT, Submission, p. 1052 (Appendix 6). See also evidence in the Transcript, p. 3.

32 *Ibid.*

staffing resources for consular work. DFAT agreed with the ANAO's six recommendations for improving the management processes and administrative systems supporting the provision of consular services.<sup>33</sup>

- 3.46 On the aspect of travel warnings issued to the Australian public by DFAT, the Israel Tourism Office in Australia gave evidence in July 2000 to the effect that the notices had, in its view, 'been harsher in their treatment of Israel than they [had] been in their treatment of other countries with worse problems'—by mentioning the threat to tourists on buses without also indicating that improved security arrangements had been made after 1996.<sup>34</sup> Media reports in April 2001 suggested, however, that Easter tourism to the Holy Land in 2001 had been adversely affected by fear of violence in the latest uprising.<sup>35</sup>
- 3.47 Comparison of the current advisory notices for Israel/Occupied Territories, Egypt and Lebanon as examples shows that visitors to all those countries are warned of the need to maintain a high level of personal security awareness.<sup>36</sup> The Committee is satisfied that the current travel advisory notices provide a realistic assessment of the security situation for Australian travellers to Israel and other countries of the region.

### Senior-level visits to the region

- 3.48 In April/May 2000, Prime Minister Howard visited Israel and Gaza, meeting separately with both Mr Barak and Mr Arafat. He thus became the first Australian Prime Minister to meet President Arafat officially.
- 3.49 While historic, the meeting underlined the relatively slight bilateral links Australia has with the PA. Most of the direct contact is through the overseas aid program which assists Palestinian refugees in the region, and works towards the establishment of civil institutions in Palestinian-controlled areas. The links with Israel on the other hand are far more developed, with well-established diplomatic and administrative contacts and trade volumes worth \$544.0 million dollars a year in 1999, and growing.<sup>37</sup>
- 3.50 In April 2001, Foreign Minister Downer visited Lebanon and Saudi Arabia. After his meeting with Lebanese President Lahoud in Beirut,

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33 ANAO Report No. 31, *Administration of Consular Services*, p. 12. The Report reviewed action taken by DFAT and other agencies to address recommendations made in an earlier report

34 Israel Tourism Office, Submission, p. 63-64 and Transcript, p. 232-33.

35 *The Canberra Times*, 14 April 2001.

36 DFAT website: [www.dfat.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/](http://www.dfat.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/) (as at 17 May 2001).

37 Australia-Israel Chamber of Commerce, Submission, p. 800.

Mr Downer issued a statement condemning the violence in the region and urging the parties to resume negotiations. His statement also expressed Australia's willingness to provide technical assistance for landmine clearance in southern Lebanon following the Israeli withdrawal.<sup>38</sup>

- 3.51 The environment within which Australia's interests are pursued in the Middle East has, according to DFAT, been enhanced by such factors as the political advances made by reformists in Iran and progress toward cooperation between Saudi Arabia and Iran. On the economic front, DFAT welcomed developments across the region:

We will benefit from the continuing efforts of governments such as Jordan, Egypt, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Oman and Yemen to strengthen their economic management and their engagement with the wider international community and the regional economy.<sup>39</sup>

- 3.52 High-level trade missions provide a visible and productive means of raising Australia's profile in the region. In February/March 2000, Trade Minister Vaile led a well-publicised Australian Business Mission to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the UAE. Australia's engagement with the region also received a boost in April 2000, when the Governor of Riyadh, Prince Salman bin Abdul Aziz, visited Australia. In addition, Joint Ministerial Commissions have become a significant element of this engagement.<sup>40</sup> These developments are discussed in more detail in Chapter 6 of this report.

- 3.53 While much of the positive news from the region relates to Australia's trade successes, DFAT assured the Committee that our interests in the Middle East are not driven entirely by trade and investment considerations:

Our interests in the Middle East are shaped by our economic considerations, but there is a range of political, strategic and human rights concerns of a global nature that are played out in the Middle East ...<sup>41</sup>

- 3.54 During Mr Howard's meeting with Mr Arafat in Gaza, he issued an invitation for the President to visit Australia at a mutually convenient time. Although a firm date for the visit has not been determined, it is seen

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38 Hon Alexander Downer MP, media release FA46, 20 April 2001; AAP newswire, 27 April 2001, story no. 1364.

39 DFAT, Transcript, p. 7.

40 DFAT, Submission, p. 29; AAP newswire, 14 March 2001, story no. 8717.

41 DFAT, Transcript, p. 15.



as a positive step in the maturing of Australia's relations with the Palestinians.<sup>42</sup> An earlier invitation issued in 1997 by Deputy Prime Minister Fischer was not proceeded with by the Howard Government, amid considerable controversy.<sup>43</sup> In an unexpected meeting in Pretoria, South Africa in April 2001, Mr Downer reportedly urged Mr Arafat to resume peace negotiations, expressed Australia's concerns about the escalating violence, and assured Mr Arafat that Australia's aid program would be continued.<sup>44</sup>

- 3.55 While bilateral trade-related visits have been an increasingly effective component of Australia's engagement with the Middle East region, senior-level visits with a broader agenda have been more sporadic. Given the opportunities presented by senior-level (and reciprocated) visits to raise Australia's profile and to enable Australia's views on the Middle East conflict to be expressed in bilateral discussions, the Committee believes that an increase in such visits would be most beneficial. For example, more regular visits by the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister and (on development assistance matters) the Parliamentary Secretary, would serve such a purpose.
- 3.56 At the conclusion of high-profile visits by senior political leaders, a comprehensive statement should be made in the Parliament.

### Recommendation 3

3.57 The Committee recommends that:

- **in addition to the official Australian parliamentary delegations to the various nations of the Middle East, the Australian Government give consideration to including the region in overseas visits by senior political leaders, in order to give a regular focus for expressing Australia's views on the Middle East conflict; and**
- **at the conclusion of such high-profile visits by political leaders, a comprehensive statement be made in the Parliament.**

42 *The Age* and *The Australian*, 25 March 2001, pp. 11 and 7 respectively.

43 Australian Federal and NSW Parliamentary Friendship Delegation, op. cit., p.124.

44 *The Age*, p. 2; *The Daily Telegraph*, p. 2; *The Australian Financial Review*, p. 6; 4 May 2001; *Australian Jewish News*, 11 May 2001, p. 9.

## Australia's Stance on Key 'Final Status' Issues

3.58 The difficult issues still to be resolved in 'final status' discussions on the Israeli-Palestinian track were listed at the beginning of this Chapter. For the most part, Australia has voiced its opinions on these problems in the context of acknowledging that the solutions should be developed by the parties themselves, with support from the international community.<sup>45</sup> On all of them, Australia has on various occasions expressed its views in both multilateral and bilateral contacts, as previously indicated in this Chapter.

### Settlements and bypass roads

3.59 As a strong statement of principle in the UNGA in 1999, and in public statements since then, Australia has condemned the settlement activity that is still occurring in the Occupied Territories as being contrary to international law and harmful to the peace process.<sup>46</sup> A contrary view was expressed in a submission from the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, which included extracts from an article discussing international law aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict.<sup>47</sup>

3.60 Although the pace of settlement activity has slowed since December 1999, continued construction and expansion has damaged the confidence of the Palestinians and the international community in the peace process. ACFOA, for example, agreed with DFAT's view:

Many Palestinians—and other members of the international community—feel that the creation of settlement blocs is contrary to the spirit of the Wye Rive accords, and that it represents unilateral Israeli decision-making on a matter that is rightfully the subject of final status negotiations.<sup>48</sup>

3.61 As DFAT explained, routine diplomatic contacts between Australia and the parties to the conflict enable Australia to express the hope that unilateral steps by any party will be avoided, including actions relating to the Israeli settlements. In such contacts, Australia has

... also made it clear to the Palestinian Authority that we do not believe that it would be productive to engage in unilateral steps of

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45 DFAT, Transcript, p. 15.

46 DFAT, Submission, pp. 2483-84 and Transcript, pp. 353, 356; World Vision Australia, Transcript, pp. 159-60.

47 ECAJ, Submission, pp. 601-16: extracts from 'Israel and Palestine - Assault on the Law of Nations' by Julius Stone.

48 ACFOA, Submission, pp. 1578-79; DFAT, Submission, p. 2484.

their own. So far as the settlements issue is concerned, we have also regularly voted—where the issue has been addressed in international forums, such as the General Assembly and [probably] in the Commission on Human Rights—in support of resolutions which are critical of settlements activity. It is a clearly established part of the Government's approach to the region that it will uphold matters of principle such as that.<sup>49</sup>

- 3.62 Australia has consistently voiced its disapproval of Israeli settlement activity, the most recent occasion being UN Resolution 54/78 of 1999. Australia has also raised the issue directly with the Israeli Government, including in particular its concerns about settlement activity at Har Homa/Jebel Abu Ghneim.<sup>50</sup> Recent editorial comment in the Australian press indicated that the 15 newest settlements in the West Bank have been built since Ariel Sharon's election in February 2001, and that 'most have generous boundaries to allow for what Mr Sharon calls "natural growth"'.<sup>51</sup> At the end of May 2001, Israeli Housing Minister (Sharansky) indicated that 710 housing units had been approved in the West Bank settlements of Maale Adumim and Alfei Menashe.<sup>52</sup>
- 3.63 On the question of the level of Israeli financial support for settlement building, DFAT was not readily able to provide information on the 1999-2000 Israeli budget allocations. Financial data for settlement-related activity is spread across a number of Israeli Ministries and programs.<sup>53</sup>

## Final Palestinian Borders and 'Statehood'

- 3.64 In Chapter 2, the issue of borders was considered in the context, not only of the development of an eventual Palestinian entity, but also of the Israeli settlement activity. Although Australia has no influence (nor should it) in negotiations for an independent Palestine, the issue is one which has considerable resonance for Middle Eastern communities in Australia. Most commentators are, however, sceptical of the economic and political

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49 DFAT, Transcript, p. 356.

50 DFAT, Submission, p. 2484 and Transcript, p. 356.

51 *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 May 2001, p. 11. See also *The Economist*, 12 May 2001, p. 15.

52 AFP newswire, 30 May 2001, story no. 7421.

53 DFAT, Submission, p. 2484.

viability of a Palestinian entity based on the non-contiguous territory presently controlled (or likely to be) by the Palestinian Authority (PA).<sup>54</sup>

- 3.65 It became increasingly clear that a final settlement of the Israeli-Arab conflict would not be negotiated by September 2000, as had been agreed between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) in September 1999. Indeed, as the year 2000 wore on, there was a growing possibility that the PLO Chairman would unilaterally declare an independent state on 13 September 2000. DFAT made the following statement in April of last year:

While Israeli acceptance of the principle of Palestinian statehood as an agreed outcome of the negotiations is now well-established, a unilateral declaration in practice would not resolve any of the final status issues ... and indeed would probably risk leaving most outstanding issues unresolved indefinitely.<sup>55</sup>

## The Palestinian National Authority

- 3.66 On 13 September 1993, the PLO and the Government of Israel signed the 'Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements' at the White House. The Declaration was preceded by an exchange of letters of mutual recognition between Israel and the PLO. The PLO Central Council met in Tunisia in the following month and authorised the Executive Committee to form the Council of the Palestinian National Authority for a transitional period, at the same time electing Chairman Yasser Arafat as President of the Council of the Palestinian National Authority. On 20 January 1996, the first Palestinian general elections were held for the Presidency and for an 88-member Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC). Although still a developing organisation, the PLC has been described as 'a lively forum for debate' and as being quite critical at times of the leadership of Mr Arafat and the PA.<sup>56</sup>
- 3.67 The Palestinian general elections in 1996 represented the first step in the process of establishing a Palestinian State, as originally envisaged in the interim arrangements agreed in Oslo 1 and Oslo 2. Since then, the question of borders and independence for a Palestinian entity has been pursued in the 'final status' discussions. Frustrated with the lack of progress in negotiations, Mr Arafat and the PLO have threatened

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54 Uniting Church in Australia (Victoria), Transcript, p. 95; Hon Ian Macdonald, Transcript, pp. 291-92; Arab Australian Action Network, Transcript, p. 317; Queensland Nationals, Transcript, p. 462; ACFOA, Submission, pp. 1569, 1633;

55 DFAT, Submission, p. 965.

56 DFAT, Transcript, p. 362.

unilateral action to declare an independent state, the most recent target date being 13 September 2000. As DFAT explained, the PLO Central Committee, in making the decision to postpone the declaration, divided almost evenly on the issue—and some members of the PLC severely criticised the postponement decision.<sup>57</sup>

3.68 In practical terms, economic viability of a Palestinian entity presents serious difficulties in the form of providing adequate revenue generation, taxation regimes, labour resources, anti-corruption measures and other important infrastructure. These difficulties have been exacerbated by the recent road closures and loss of revenues in the wake of the current uprising. Reports from the UN indicated as early as December 2000, that the fighting had left the fledgling Palestinian economy in ruins and had taken a serious economic toll on Israel as well.<sup>58</sup>

3.69 Although the PA produced its first balanced budget in mid 2000, DFAT outlined the reality behind a 4 per cent growth rate in the previous year:

[The economy] is starting from a very low base. It is also growing largely in the public sector at the moment. The jobs that are being created are mainly in the public service, security forces and other areas which are not necessarily a sustainable proposition. There is very limited investment in productive enterprise in the West Bank and in Gaza at the moment. Partly that is a factor of the absence of coherent law facilities ... ; partly it is a question of political uncertainty.

... [T]hat balanced budget does not include such things as recurrent maintenance costs, which suggest that there is a long way to go before they get the taxation structures and so on in place.<sup>59</sup>

3.70 Australia's overseas aid program to the Palestinians includes confidence-building and institution-building initiatives such as the Rule of Law project being conducted by Australian Legal Resources International. This project is discussed in more detail in Chapter 10 of this report.

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57 DFAT, Transcript, pp. 362-63.

58 Details on crippling unemployment in Palestine, loss of income, and falling living standards were provided by *The Sydney Morning Herald* website: [www.smh.com.au/news](http://www.smh.com.au/news) (at 7 December 2000), 'Fighting has left Palestinian economy in ruins, says UN' [*The New York Times*]. See also a press briefing by the Commissioner-General of UNRWA on 6 December 2000 which noted that some \$500.0 million had been lost to the Palestinian economy over the previous two months.

59 DFAT, Transcript, p. 24.

## The Palestinian refugees

- 3.71 In this section, the Palestinian refugee issue is raised in the context of Australia's contribution to international efforts to find a just and lasting solution to an extremely difficult problem, which has deep historical and emotional roots. The issue of Palestinian refugees goes to the heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict.<sup>60</sup>
- 3.72 The history and current situation of the Palestinian refugees living in the Middle East was outlined in Chapter 2 of this report. As a major component of Australia's aid program to the Middle East, assistance to Palestinian refugees living in the Middle East is discussed in Chapter 10 of this report.
- 3.73 Palestinians comprise the largest group of refugees in the world. The first Arab-Israeli war of 1948-49 precipitated the exodus of around two thirds of Palestine's Arab population, although the precise numbers have been disputed ever since. The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has, since 1950, cared for and educated the refugees who live in purpose-built camps. Under UNRWA's operational definitions, Palestinian refugees are persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine between June 1946 and May 1948, who lost their homes and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948-49 Arab-Israeli conflict, and who took refuge in Transjordan (now the West Bank and Jordan), Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic or the Egyptian-administered Gaza Strip. UNRWA's services are available to all those who meet this definition, who are registered with the Agency and who need assistance. UNRWA's definition also covers the descendants of persons who became refugees in 1948.
- 3.74 In January 1996, UNRWA had a total registry of 3,246,044 refugees, approximately 33 per cent of whom still resided in the 59 UNRWA-organised camps in Jordan, the West Bank, Gaza, Syria, and Lebanon. The number of registered refugees living in camps as a percentage of the registered refugees was at that time highest in Gaza (55.0 per cent) and lowest in Jordan (19.3 per cent). The number of registered Palestinian refugees grew from 914,000 in 1950 to more than 3.8 million in 2001, and continues to rise due to natural population growth.<sup>61</sup>

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60 Joffe, op. cit., pp. 403-404; Ali Kazak, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 January 2001, p. 12.

61 Official UNRWA website: [www.un.org/unrwa/index.html](http://www.un.org/unrwa/index.html) (at 18 May 2001) and Donna E Arzt, *Refugees into Citizens: Palestine and the End of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, Council on Foreign Relations, 1997, pp. 36-37. See also 'Plight of the Refugees', published as a supplement to *National Geographic*, December 1999.

3.75 In evidence, ACFOA highlighted the plight of post-1948 refugees who therefore do not receive assistance from UNRWA, making them even more vulnerable:

... they have no entitlements to UNRWA assistance or are very insecure in their situation and their status where they are living—especially in Lebanon, where the number of unregistered refugees is ... about 50,000. Those people have no access to UNRWA services or to non-governmental services, no right to work—and you can go on.<sup>62</sup>

3.76 The principle of the 'right of return' for refugees displaced in the series of Arab-Israeli wars was grounded in three UN resolutions (UNGA Resolution 194 of 1948; Security Council Resolutions 242 of 1967 and 338 of 1973) and the launching of the Oslo process. However, the UNSCR resolutions 'leave open' the question of precisely where the refugees should be returned to in the final settlement of the conflict:

... it is quite clear that any solution, based on two states, will require the preservation of Israel as a Jewish state, and Israel's government and its political system simply will not entertain the notion of any significant number of refugees returning to Israel proper.<sup>63</sup>

3.77 ACFOA believes that, without a comprehensive settlement of the Palestinian refugee problem, including the right of return, the right of restitution and the right of citizenship in a nation state, there is little chance of long-term regional peace in the Middle East.<sup>64</sup>

3.78 The submission made by the Delegation of the NSW and Federal Branches of the Parliamentary Friends of Palestine recommended that Australia exert maximum pressure on Israel to 'recognise its responsibilities towards the Palestinian refugees and permit their right of return and compensation in accordance with UN Resolution 194'. The submission also recommended that Australia increase its humanitarian aid funding for Palestinian refugees in Gaza, Jordan and Lebanon.<sup>65</sup>

3.79 In Donna Arzt's book, previously cited, she suggested a plan for permanent regional absorption of the Palestinian refugees, to be discussed within the context of the multilateral rather than the bilateral negotiation process. Target absorption populations as a basis for discussion were

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62 ACFOA, Transcript, p. 385.

63 DFAT, Transcript, p. 13.

64 ACFOA, Submission, p. 1575.

65 Submission, op. cit., p. 124.

proposed for Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank and Gaza as well as other Arab countries of the Middle East. In addition, Arzt formulated notional absorption targets for states outside the Middle East.<sup>66</sup> The absorption proposals have generated considerable controversy in the Arab world and in Israel as well.

3.80 In relation to the estimated 350,000 refugees in Lebanon, who are largely from Galilee and the coastal towns and cities such as Haifa, DFAT indicated that these refugees would not necessarily see the prospect of 'return' to the West Bank or Gaza as a desirable outcome. Further, DFAT concluded that it is not likely that many of them would be able to return to what is now Israel, since such an outcome would involve a sovereign decision by Israel to admit them.<sup>67</sup>

3.81 ACFOA agreed that many of the refugees in the Lebanon camps understand that they can not return to exactly where they came from in what is now Israel. Rather, what they seek, is:

... recognition of the stages of being a refugee—where they came from and their ability or choice to go back to a Palestinian state, and their right to compensation because they lost their livelihoods, their houses and their lands. ... When you look at the identity cards of the refugees in Lebanon, you see that their nationality is not mentioned—their nationality is 'stateless'.<sup>68</sup>

3.82 On the issue of whether Australia would be prepared to accept some share of non-Middle East states target numbers, DFAT informed the Committee that policy consideration of such a proposal was not yet on the agenda, although it would be a joint responsibility of that department and the Department of Immigration and Multicultural affairs (DIMA).<sup>69</sup> During a visit to the Middle East by Immigration Minister Ruddock earlier this year, media reports in Australia raised the possibility of resettling Palestinian refugees in this country, if the Palestinian authorities initiated such a proposal in the context of a comprehensive peace settlement agreed between Israel and the Palestinians.<sup>70</sup>

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66 Arzt, op. cit., Chapter 4, pp. 85-94.

67 DFAT, Transcript, p. 14.

68 ACFOA, Transcript, pp. 384-85.

69 DFAT, Transcript, p. 14.

70 *The Canberra Times*, 18 January 2001, p. 3.



## Water resources

- 3.83 Australia is still a member of the Water Resources Group established under the multilateral (or Moscow) track of the peace process agreed at the Madrid Peace Conference of October 1991. This specialised working group is one of five which focus on particular issues of regional rather than bilateral concerns.<sup>71</sup> Over time, the working groups developed codes of conduct and practical infrastructure projects such as highways and water pipelines. Successful results were expected to give each of the Middle East countries involved a vested interest in achieving a lasting peace—in other words, a peace dividend.<sup>72</sup>
- 3.84 Within the ambit of the Water Resources Working Group, Australia organised a seminar in 1995 on cloud seeding which was attended by representatives from a range of Middle East countries including Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Oman and the Palestinian territories. Australia was involved until late 1997 in a major project sponsored by the US to provide a common water database for Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian territories. Australia was regarded as the leading contributor in the Arms Control and Regional Security Working Group on a project designed to develop confidence-building regional security arrangements.<sup>73</sup>
- 3.85 The Committee understands that Australian funding support for the two Working Groups has been provided through AusAID, although the activities of all five Groups have declined since the mid 1990s. Attempts to revive them following initial progress at Camp David in July 2000 were thwarted by loss of confidence in the peace process during the second half of that year which saw the start of the current Palestinian uprising.
- 3.86 In the context of Israel's relations with its Arab neighbours, water resources issues are clearly essential ingredients for any permanent settlement of the conflict. The Committee agrees with views expressed in several submissions that Australia should do more to re-activate the Working Groups, which appear to have lost considerable momentum in recent years.<sup>74</sup>

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71 The others are: Arms Control and Regional Security; Environment; Economic Development; and Refugees.

72 Joffe, *op. cit.*, pp. 105, 111 (Chapter 11).

73 DFAT, Submission, p. 967

74 For example, Submissions from: ACFOA, pp. 1575, 1580; Mr Ali Kazak, pp. 416-27; and WVA, pp. 1441-43. See also WVA, Transcript, pp. 154-55.

**Recommendation 4**

- 3.87 **The Committee recommends that, notwithstanding the setbacks which have been experienced in the peace process since the second half of 2000, the Australian Government support revival of the multilateral working groups in which Australia has particular expertise—the Arms Control/Regional Security Working Group and the Water Resources Working Group.**

**Palestinian Representation**

- 3.88 In Australia, Palestinians have been represented since 1991/92 by what is termed a 'General Palestinian Delegation', which takes the form of a Regional Mission for Australia, New Zealand and the south Pacific region, located in Canberra. The Head of the Delegation is Mr Ali Kazak, who gave evidence to the Committee. The General Palestinian Delegation does not enjoy diplomatic status, but appears rather to have a ranking similar to 'observer' for official purposes.
- 3.89 Submissions from Mr Kazak, from Professor Saikal and from the Australian Arabic Council recommended that Australia recognise the independent 'State of Palestine' immediately, without waiting for a final settlement between Israel and the Palestinians.<sup>75</sup> In light of continued escalation of the fighting, however, the prospect of a resumption of final settlement negotiations appears to be an increasingly distant one.
- 3.90 The Australian Arabic Council wrote to the Committee in the following terms:

Despite the resounding support for Palestinians around the world and an acceptance in the international community of their mistreatment and suffering, they have yet to attain autonomy and an independent Palestinian state. Unfortunately, Australia continues to deny the inalienable Palestinian right to self-determination by continually refusing to recognise the Palestinian state. ... The argument that Australia must maintain a neutral position only goes to strengthen its perceived bias towards Israel. The argument of neutrality is not formed from a moral or strategic position, but rather from a position of fear and capitulation to the

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75 A Kazak, Submission , p. 357; Professor A Saikal, Australian National University, Submission, p. 484; Australian Arabic Council, Submission, p. 17.

backlash and outcry it will receive from Israel if it were to take the bold step.<sup>76</sup>

- 3.91 In his submission, Mr Kazak indicated that, since the PLO's peace proposal of November 1988, over 123 countries have recognised the State of Palestine and established full diplomatic relations. On 15 December 1988, the UNGA designated Palestine as a Permanent Observer in place of the PLO.<sup>77</sup> UNGA Resolution 52/250 of 1998 conferred upon Palestine in its capacity of observer additional rights and privileges, including the right to participation in the general debates, but not including the right to vote or to put forward candidates.<sup>78</sup>
- 3.92 On the basis of its visit to the Middle East last year, the delegation of the NSW and Federal Branches of the Parliamentary Friends of Palestine strongly recommended that the level of recognition currently accorded to the General Palestinian Delegation be raised in order to match the status of Palestinian missions in some European nations—the delegation's submission referred to Palestinian missions in Spain, Italy, Greece, Austria and France. In the delegation's view, increased status would also acknowledge the positive efforts and concessions made by the Palestinians in bilateral discussions with Israel. The delegation also formed the view that Israel is increasingly prepared to acknowledge that a Palestinian state is inevitable.<sup>79</sup>
- 3.93 While appreciating the conviction of the proposers of increased status for the Palestinian mission in Australia, the Committee also acknowledges the positive symbolic and practical value of the recent establishment of an Australian office in Ramallah, even if it falls within the overall authority of the embassy in Tel Aviv. Until such time as an independent Palestinian entity emerges through the final status negotiations, it is difficult to see how Australia could accord the existing Palestinian representation a higher degree of official recognition. However, a gradual approach to the issue may be helpful in the longer term.
- 3.94 The relative status of the General Palestinian Delegation in Australia appears to the Committee to require some clarification, given the passage of time since the Delegation's office was established in the early 1990s and

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76 Australian Arabic Council, Submission, pp. 1823-24.

77 Mr Ali Kazak, Submission, pp. 354-55.

78 New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *United Nations Handbook 1999*, 37<sup>th</sup> edition, p. 19.

79 Delegation of the NSW and Federal Parliamentary Friends of Palestine, Submission, op. cit., pp. 126-27. The submission states that, although the particular Palestinian missions have diplomatic status, they are not embassies—Permanent Mission of Palestine (Austria); General Delegation of Palestine (France); Diplomatic Representation of Palestine (Greece).

the developments that have occurred in the Middle East negotiations. A more structured and, perhaps, consistent relationship should be established with the current General Palestinian Delegation, irrespective of its title. When the final status negotiations have reached a tangible stage of progress on the future of the Palestinian entity, Australia should make preparation for establishing a permanent Palestinian mission with full diplomatic status.

### **Recommendation 5**

3.95 **The Committee recommends that:**

- **the Australian Government review the formal arrangements through which the Palestinian General Delegation currently represents Palestinian interests in Australia, in order to ascertain whether those arrangements sufficiently reflect the maturing relationship between Australia and the Palestinian authorities; and**
- **preparation be made by the Australian Government for establishing a permanent Palestinian mission with full diplomatic status as soon as significant progress has been made in the 'final status' negotiations between the parties.**