



THE HON STEPHEN SMITH MP



29 JUL 2008

Mrs Julia Irwin MP
Chair
Standing Committee on Petitions
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Madam Chair

Thank you for your letter dated 25 June 2008 on behalf of the Standing Committee on Petitions, concerning a petition on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Fundamental to the Australian Government's Middle East policy is a commitment to a two-state solution to the conflict, based on Israel's right to live in peace within secure borders, and in recognition of the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people for their own state. Australia supports a negotiated solution to the conflict consistent with UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338.

The Government calls on Israel and the Palestinian Authority to implement their Roadmap for Peace obligations announced in 2002 and remain focused on the negotiations launched at Annapolis, which offer a path towards a peaceful and just settlement. The important question of Palestinian refugees is formally recognised in the Roadmap for Peace as a key issue in the ongoing negotiations between the parties.

Australia and Israel enjoy a strong relationship and close and vibrant community links, as reflected in the Parliamentary motion on 12 March. Links with the Palestinian authorities are also strong.

The humanitarian situation of Palestinians remains of deep concern to the Government. The renewed violence is affecting civilian populations in both Israel and Gaza and undermining the peace process. In December 2007, the Government announced the doubling of aid to the Palestinian Territories to \$45 million for 2008. The assistance includes \$25 million in assistance to Palestinians affected by the humanitarian situation in Gaza, the West Bank and surrounding countries, and \$20 million to support the implementation of the Palestinian Authority's Reform and Development Plan. Our aid will incorporate assistance to deliver health and education services as well as support for emergency assistance to Palestinian refugees. The Government continues to look for opportunities to provide practical support to the peace process.

Thank you for referring this petition to me.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Smith