



**Senator the Hon Penny Wong**  
**Minister for Foreign Affairs**

MC24-001476

Ms Susan Templeman MP  
Chair  
Standing Committee Committee on Petitions  
petitions.committee.reps@aph.gov.au

Dear Ms Templeman

Thank you for your email of 12 February 2024 regarding petition number EN5622 concerning the Israel-Hamas conflict. I know the conflict in the Middle East is deeply distressing for many Australians, particularly those with a connection to the region and loved ones directly impacted.

It is clear from the Government's engagements Australia has a respected voice in the Middle East, even if we are not a central player. I regularly raise Australia's view and press for progress towards peace in my engagements with counterparts in the Middle East, with partners including in Europe, Canada, Japan, the United Kingdom, the United States, and our region, as well as in multilateral forums.

We are using Australia's voice to advocate for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire and a pathway out of this conflict. As demonstrated by our vote at the United Nations, Australia is part of the international diplomatic effort urging an immediate humanitarian ceasefire. We see that as a critical, urgent step on the path to a permanent ceasefire. Like any ceasefire, this can't be one-sided. Hamas must cease its attacks, lay down its arms and release all hostages immediately.

In my visit to the region earlier this year, I made clear Australia's view that achieving peace and security for Israelis and Palestinians requires a two-state solution and the establishment of a Palestinian state. The status quo is failing everyone.

We are using our voice to express Australia's serious concern about the civilian death toll and dire humanitarian situation in Gaza. I have consistently emphasised that international law must be upheld – and that civilians and civilian infrastructure must be protected.

We are using our voice to advocate for the immediate and unconditional release of hostages by Hamas, and to condemn the October 7 terrorist attacks by Hamas. I have expressed our concern for hostages directly to families when I met with them in Australia and in Israel.

We are using our voice to express our grave concern at indications Israel is planning a ground offensive into Rafah. About 1.7 million Palestinians are taking refuge in the area. With the humanitarian situation in Gaza already dire, the impacts on Palestinian civilians from a major military operation would be catastrophic. Our message to Israel is: do not go down this path.

While I was in the West Bank, I met with Palestinian victims of violence by Israeli settlers. I made clear to my counterparts that this violence must cease and perpetrators must be held accountable. We consistently affirm that settlements are illegal under international law and a major impediment to peace.

Australia is using our voice to advocate for urgent humanitarian assistance to reach Palestinians in Gaza in desperate need, and to address the protracted refugee crisis in the region. While in Jordan, I announced an additional \$21.5 million in humanitarian assistance.

In March, we announced that Australia will also support efforts by Jordan and the United Arab Emirates to assist with the delivery of vital humanitarian aid to civilians in Gaza. A Royal Australian Air Force C-17A Globemaster will deliver a supply of 140 Australian Defence Force aerial delivery parachutes for use in humanitarian assistance airdrops by Jordan and the United Arab Emirates.

The Australian Government is also providing an additional \$4 million to UNICEF to provide urgent services, including for women and children, and \$2 million to the new mechanism of the UN Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza to facilitate expanded humanitarian access into Gaza.

These announcements bring Australia's total humanitarian contribution since this conflict began to \$52.5 million and is in addition to Australia's core funding of \$20.6 million for UNRWA, which has already been provided for this financial year.

The humanitarian crisis and the catastrophic consequences of regional escalation underlines why we are using our voice to advocate for parties to avoid the conflict spreading.

My engagements in the region underlined how heavily this conflict weighs on the peoples of this region. We mourn every Israeli and Palestinian innocent life which has been lost in this conflict and will continue to use our voice to support steps to peace in the region.

Israelis and Palestinians want and deserve to live their lives in peace, security and dignity.

Seeing the impacts of the conflict close up underscored to me the importance of remembering our common humanity, and how important it is that we safeguard peaceful dialogue in our community in Australia.

Thank you very much for your correspondence on this important matter.

 Yours sincerely

PENNY WONG

11 APR 2024