JOINT STATEMENT
BY THE MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
SENATOR GARETH EVANS,
AND THE MINISTER FOR DEVELOPMENT
COOPERATION, GORDON BILNEY

M147/MDC56 2 OCTOBER 1993
EMBARGO: 0300 HOURS

AUSTRALIA PLEDGES $15 MILLION ASSISTANCE PACKAGE TO SUPPORT MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Australia will provide $15 million for development activities to help secure lasting peace in the Middle East following the agreement between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) on Palestinian interim self-government, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Senator Evans, and the Minister for Development Cooperation, Gordon Bilney, said today.

Senator Evans said “Australia warmly welcomes the agreement between Israel and the PLO as it heralds a new era of political stability and potential economic prosperity in the region.

“The challenge the international community now faces is that of ensuring that the agreement does not founder for lack of economic support.

“As Australia recognises the importance of the agreement to regional and global security we will provide practical assistance to help make it work,” Senator Evans said.

The Minister for Development Cooperation, Gordon Bilney, said “Australia will provide $15 million over three years through the overseas aid program for a range of development activities.”

The Ministers made the announcement to coincide with the international donors’ meeting in Washington.

Mr Bilney said “The funding represents a 50% increase in our assistance to Palestinians. The value of that assistance will be increased further by providing more than half of the it in the first year. This will meet pressing development needs in Palestinian communities and give added support to the peace process.

“Priority areas will include income generation, training, health, sanitation and water resources.

“Australia is an active participant in the Water Resources and Arms Control and Regional Security working groups of the multilateral track of the Middle East peace process.

“Australia will increase support for new and existing programs through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), which is best equipped effectively to deliver timely assistance to the Palestinians.

“The Government will also provide funding for Australian non government organisations, several of which already have strong links with local organisations,” Mr Bilney said.

Funds for the development activities will be provided through AIDAB, Australia’s overseas aid agency.

* * * * * *