RELEASE OF THE ROAD MAP TO PEACE

I warmly welcome the release of the long-awaited “road map” to peace for Israelis and Palestinians which aims for the creation of a Palestinian State by 2005, where Palestinians would live in peace alongside Israel.

The road map was devised by the United States, the European Union, Russia and the United Nations who have decided that the endless round of violence and retaliation in violence has got to stop and that the international community must play a role in ending this conflict which, tragically, has been going on for more than 50 years.

The road map is not an immediate panacea. Experience has taught us that progress will not be easy. There will be setbacks. Yesterday’s terrible suicide bombing was a reminder of this. But the suicide-homicide bombers must not be allowed to undermine the peace process.

The appointment of Mahmoud Abbas, the new Palestinian Prime Minister, was a pre-condition for the release of the road map. We welcomed his appointment. We also welcome the formal approval of his Government by the Palestinian Legislative Council. Mr Abbas’s Government and the Israeli Government must now be given a chance to make the road map work.

Those of good will on both sides - with the strong support of the international community - must seize the opportunity the road map represents. No one can afford more squandered opportunities or more squandered lives.

Australia has called repeatedly on the international community and on the two sides to redouble their efforts to bring the conflict to an end. We now look forward to seeing the rapid implementation of the road map.

As I have said before, Australia stands ready to make a practical contribution to support those committed to the peace process. We will look for opportunities to do this in the context of the road map.

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