Middle East Situation

I am shocked at the further deterioration of the situation overnight, including the brutal lynching of the three Israelis held by the Palestinian police, and the retaliatory attacks by Israeli forces.

The cycle of violence must end and security cooperation between both sides must be resumed. The peace process cannot be abandoned. There is no real alternative - for either side - to a negotiated settlement based on UN Resolutions 242, 338, and the principle of land for peace.

The future of the region rests with those who seek peace, not violence. I urge both sides to show leadership and restraint. Both the Israelis and the Palestinians must seek to ease tensions, and to rebuild confidence and mutual respect.

Earlier today I spoke with the Israeli Ambassador, Mr Levy, and Mr Ali Kazak, head of the General Palestinian Delegation. I reiterated my views on the situation.

Following the escalation of violence overnight, I am very concerned about the safety of Australians in Israel, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. My Department is issuing a new travel advice which urges Australians currently in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip to consider leaving unless they have compelling reasons to stay.

Australian citizens are also advised to defer travel to East Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and parts of Israel affected by the latest outbreak of violence, until further notice.

Australia is not a regional player and our leverage in this situation is limited. However, we offer our full support to peace initiatives and other efforts being made by UN Secretary General Annan, who has just returned to Israel, to President Clinton, and to regional leaders.

I also made an immediate decision last week to provide $500,000 in emergency medical assistance to be shared between UNRWA and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

FA117