Mitchell Report into Violence in the Middle East

I welcome the report of the international committee led by former US Senator George Mitchell into the causes of the current violence in the Middle East.

I am pleased that both Israel and the Palestinian Authority have responded positively to its recommendations and I now urge all sides to take immediate steps to implement these recommendations.

The Australian Government is disappointed and alarmed that the deadly violence between Israel and the Palestinians has continued to escalate. We are encouraged, therefore, at the announcement of a unilateral ceasefire by the Israeli Prime Minister, Mr Sharon, and we urge the Palestinian Authority to reciprocate this initiative.

Without immediate and significant efforts by all sides, it will be very difficult to rebuild the trust and mutual confidence upon which a negotiated settlement must be constructed. There can be no winners from a continuation of the present violence. We believe there is no alternative for Israel and the Palestinians to a negotiated settlement, nor any alternative to negotiations between Israel and neighbouring Arab states to end their conflicts.

Australia calls upon all parties to refrain from provocative actions which can only further increase tensions at this sensitive time and exacerbate the pain and suffering. We urge both sides now to break the vicious cycle of violence through the exercise of leadership and restraint.

We endorse the recommendations of the Mitchell Report as a basis for stemming the violence and returning to peace negotiations.

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