



The General Delegation of Palestine

Annual Report

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The General Delegation of Palestine to Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific

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Ambassador's Foreword

Ernest Hemingway in *The Old Man and the Sea*: "A man can be destroyed but cannot be defeated."

On this earth, there is what makes life worth living

The year 2023 witnessed many important events and political developments in occupied Palestine and the wider Middle East region, significantly impacting the policies and positions of Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand, and Pacific countries.

However, the most significant, without any doubt, is the unprecedented Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip ongoing since October 8 and its catastrophic repercussions at every level, from local, regional, to international.

Accordingly, the introduction of this report will focus on this crucial event and the political and legal framework of the position of the General Delegation of Palestine in Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand, and the Pacific.



Unfortunately, the brutal Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip continues, subjecting the Palestinian people to ongoing Israeli policies of collective punishment, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and forced displacement. These violations are in addition to Israel's policy of mass arbitrary detention of Palestinian civilians, escalating Israeli settler terrorism, and violent occupation incursions in the occupied West Bank and Jerusalem.

However, in spite of being subjected to shocking and widespread atrocities and suffering, the Palestinian people remain steadfast and determined to achieve their inalienable national and political rights, including the right to self-determination through the realization of an independent and sovereign Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital, and the right of return for Palestinian refugees.

All attempts by Israel, the occupying power, to destroy this vision and eradicate the Palestinian people as a nation have failed and will continue to fail, precisely because of the historic, enduring steadfastness of the Palestinian people on their land, and their unparalleled resilience and resistance.

Is it vital that the brutality of the illegal colonial occupation and its apartheid regime, with its systematic policy of violence and brute force (enabled by the double standards of the United

Ambassador's Foreword

States and the Western bloc and the failure of the international community to enforce a permanent ceasefire or take action to prevent or punish Israeli war crimes and crimes against humanity committed against our people in the Gaza Strip) should not divert us from our strong belief in the power, nobility, and importance of international law.

Since its creation, Israel has consistently and systematically bullied, attacked, undermined, and intimidated any international organization or individual defending the rule of international law – blatantly and desperately attempting to shield itself from legal and moral accountability for its outrageous ongoing violations and crimes.

No state should behave or be treated as if it is above the law: there must be an end to Israel's long-standing impunity and evasion of any accountability, and its war criminals must be brought to justice before the International Criminal Court.

The reference for the Palestinian national struggle must always be derived from the spirit of international law, international legitimacy, and the legitimacy of the United Nations; adhering to our firm values of justice, equality, and dignity.

The Palestinian people's adoption of these values and principles is one of the main reasons for the historical and ongoing support and solidarity of international grassroots movements, civil society organizations, and other oppressed and colonized peoples worldwide. The governments of the world cannot ignore the strength and nobility of our cause precisely because it is so deeply rooted in principles of international law, human rights, and justice.

The Palestinian national liberation movement has the capacity, history, and experience to push forward a global agenda based on the concepts of justice and collective liberation from colonialism. By building an international coalition against colonialism, discrimination, oppression, and apartheid, we can collectively demand dignity, equality, and justice on the basis of international law, multilateralism, and an international system based on rules rather than power.

As the year 2023 draws to a close amid the most difficult and complex times in our modern history, the pain and suffering of our people in the Gaza Strip never leaves our minds.

We all pray for them, for their lives and for their rights, while taking action to demand an immediate and permanent ceasefire without further delay.

All peace-loving and justice-loving nations and their leaders must be courageous and act immediately to stop the criminal Israeli assaults and atrocities against our people in the Gaza Strip, to ensure the safety, dignity, and survival of the Palestinian people in their own land.

Izzat Abdulhadi



Ambassador of the State of Palestine

Head of the General Delegation of Palestine to Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific

Political Context

1. The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict



Over the past year, the Palestinian Embassy in Canberra has followed the most important political developments in Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand, and the Pacific with great interest, especially the positions of these countries on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the grave Israeli violations of human rights in the State of Palestine, and their positions on recognising the Palestinian state.

The 75th anniversary of the Palestinian Nakba was an important opportunity to raise these critical issues and emphasise the importance of Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific states' role within the international community in recognising the Palestinian Nakba and affirming the Palestinian narrative of ethnic cleansing and colonialism that has taken place from 1948. The United Nations has been a significant platform to host these discourses. Many other related issues were also raised during the anniversary, especially Israel's establishment of an apartheid regime in Palestine and its relationship to the one-state or two-state solution.

However, the most important development was the Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip on October 8, following Hamas' "Tawafan Al Aqsa" operation on October 7, where 1200 persons were killed. Israel's aggression has reaped serious repercussions on the Palestinian people, mainly in the Gaza Strip, and had subsequent political effects on the rest of the Palestinian Territories and the entire Middle East region.



The Palestinian Embassy held these events in grave regard as it worked intensively with official bodies, numerous media outlets, civil society, as well as Palestinian, Arab and Islamic communities.

The Tawafan Al Asqa operation cannot be analysed within a vacuum, however. Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip live in harsh conditions mired by food insecurity, electricity and water cuts, and poverty due primarily to Israel's blockade of Gaza since 2007. Israel's blockade has affected almost all essential services, including health, water, sanitation and schooling. Given waste plants were forced to close, children had been forced to persist through freezing sewage to attend school. This situation is described by the UN as being in a state of 'de-development.' In 2022, the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories determined that the "political system of entrenched rule" in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip "satisfies the prevailing evidentiary standard for the existence of apartheid".

Less than two months prior to the operation, King Abdullah II of Jordan lamented that Palestinians had "no civil rights" and "no freedom of mobility". Saudi Arabia warned of an "explosion" due to the continued occupation and Egypt had warned of a catastrophe unless political progress was made.



Beyond the catastrophic conflict in Gaza since October 7, the West Bank has also experienced an escalating situation. Incidents of violence have risen steeply, and healthy livelihoods are becoming more untenable for Palestinians. Fatal raids by Israeli forces are taking place across the territory on a near daily basis. IDF soldiers have barged into homes, leaving children traumatised, and violence from settlers against Palestinians have increased dramatically with UNOCHA recording over 550 incidents since October 7. Additionally, over 400 Palestinians have been killed and 4,500 injured in the West Bank since October 7. Arbitrary arrests and detentions have also risen as over 7,000 Palestinians have been arrested in the West Bank since October 7. The plight of women particularly has worsened too, with Israeli forces perpetrating higher numbers of sexual assaults and denial to food, medicine, and period products.

1.1 Positions of Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand

The position of the Australian and Aotearoa New Zealand governments, albeit with slight differences, continues to support the two-state solution through direct negotiations between the Palestinian and Israeli parties, thus linking the recognition of the State of Palestine and the right to self-determination to Israel's consent through the so-called "Middle East peace process."

However, the right to self-determination and recognition of a Palestinian state is a right under international law and is not pending on Israeli approval as an outcome of bilateral negotiations.



Therefore, we called on both governments to recognise the Palestinian state without further delay, in accordance with the provisions of international law and international legitimacy, and to advocate for and preserve the two-state solution, which Israel is destroying daily through its colonial settlement program and its confiscation and theft of Palestinian lands and natural resources.

The issue of recognising the State of Palestine has been of great importance in both Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, as the General Conference of the Australian Labor Party in 2018, 2021 and 2023 passed three resolutions calling on the current government to recognise the State of Palestine.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, the Labour Party discussed recognising the state of Palestine at its most recent conference, with a majority of members in favour of the decision. However, Labour's failure in the recent parliamentary elections, and the victory of the National Party in coalition with two other conservative parties, may largely derail Aotearoa New Zealand's recognition of a Palestinian state until the Labour party is re-elected.

However, this is not expected to be achieved by the two countries due to various reasons, the most important of which are: Australia's foreign policy alignment with the US position, pressure from pro-Israel organisations, the current government's focus on the Asia-Pacific region, the strained relationship with China, and other important domestic issues, especially climate change, indigenous rights, and the deteriorating economic situation.

In this context, we should take into consideration the impact of the war in Gaza on the issue of Palestinian self-determination especially with the increasing tendency for the western bloc to link the "Day After" in Gaza to a political solution in particular the recognition of the Palestinian state.

Upon the election of the centre-left Labor government in Australia, four primary changes in its wider political behaviour toward Palestine can be observed which correlate with possible state-recognition. Firstly, it reversed its recognition of the Israeli capital as West Jerusalem. Foreign Minister Penny Wong reiterated that the government would “not support an approach that undermines [the] prospect” of the two-state solution. Additionally, the Labor government began to use different terminology when referring to Palestine. Instead of “Palestinian Territories”, it is now “Occupied Palestinian Territories”, which is conducive to political progress on recognising Israel’s occupation. Thirdly, the Labor government has returned funding to UNRWA to \$20 million per annum from \$10 million after it was lowered under the previous Morrison government.

Lastly, Australia has changed its voting pattern in the UN General Assembly and the UN Human Rights Council on Palestinian resolutions. Australia’s voting under its new Labor government on these resolutions has improved compared to the previous Coalition government. While Australia abstained from the UNGA resolution calling for a humanitarian truce in October, it voted in favour of an immediate ceasefire in Gaza in the December UNGA resolution.

Regarding Aotearoa New Zealand’s position, there have been significant positive developments in bilateral relations with Palestine. Aotearoa New Zealand continued its positive votes on Palestinian resolutions at the United Nations and regular political consultations between the two countries. It is also worth noting that the diplomatic status of the Palestinian mission has been enhanced, with the Palestinian Ambassador invited to participate in several diplomatic events in Aotearoa New Zealand.

1.2 Progress towards Recognition of Palestinian Statehood

The Palestinian Delegation sent two concept papers outlining the significance of recognising the State of Palestine to Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong and then-Aotearoa New Zealand Foreign Minister Nanaia Mahuta. Both papers articulated our position on why Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand should recognise the State of Palestine and had the same substantive arguments. The only differences were two additional arguments which were country-specific to Australia, those being how statehood recognition would align with Australian public sentiment, and how it would fulfil Australia’s moral responsibility. The arguments given to both states are outlined below:

1. To align with global consensus

By recognising the State of Palestine, Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand would be joining a growing global consensus of 139 countries which have already done so, including like-minded states such as Sweden and the Vatican, and key partners to Australia such as Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, India, and Türkiye.

2. To align with the Australian public (Australia specific)

The Australian public and civil society have expressed clear, widespread support for recognising Palestinian statehood, with over half of Australians agreeing that Palestine should

be recognised as an independent state and only 9% opposing the concept in a 2022 survey. Labor Party grassroots movements and state branches have also repeatedly endorsed and reaffirmed the ALP National Platform position calling to recognise Palestine as a state, most recently in motions passed at the respective Labor Party State Conferences in Queensland and Victoria.

3. To save the two-state solution

For 30 years since the Oslo Accords, bilateral negotiations between Israel and Palestine have failed to deliver any substantial outcomes due to Israel's blanket rejection of Palestinian self-determination and utter intransigence towards negotiating key final status issues (Jerusalem, settlements, refugees, security, water, and borders). Meanwhile, Israel continues to actively, systematically undermine the viability of the two-state solution through relentless annexation efforts, both de facto and de jure, that are detrimental to the territorial contiguity of the State of Palestine. The continuation of Israel's illegal colonial settlement program alone demonstrates that Israeli leadership is not interested in the prospect of a peaceful coexistence between two states. In the absence of a genuine peace process, the unjust status quo of annexation and settlements will continue until the two-state solution is rendered entirely unviable. The result will be a one-state reality; either that of an apartheid state, which is unacceptable to the Palestinian people and international community, or a non-Jewish democratic state with a majority Palestinian population, which is unacceptable to Israel. Other solutions are blatantly immoral, and would involve either the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, or the continuation of Israel's de facto annexation of Palestinian land.

4. To secure a just and durable peace

Bilateral negotiations between Israel (the occupier) and Palestine (the occupied) are characterised by a stark power imbalance at the negotiating table. Negotiations conducted on such unequal terms cannot resolve the final status issues (Jerusalem, settlements, refugees, security, water, and borders), as Israel is able to maintain its position of total intransigence while systematically undermining the two-state solution, with no accountability. Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand recognising the State of Palestine would empower Palestine's position considerably and would be a significant step towards balanced negotiations and a just and durable peace.

5. To align with international law and international legitimacy

The right of the Palestinian people to self-determination is a basic human right and a fundamental principle of international law, enshrined in the United Nations Charter and other legally binding international treaties and covenants that Australia is party to. This right has also been affirmed by countless relevant United Nations resolutions. Palestine meets all of the legal requirements for statehood, as outlined by the 1933 Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States; Palestine has (a) a permanent population, (b) a defined territory, (c) a government, and (d) a proven capacity to enter into relations with other states. Palestinian statehood is also supported by the constitutive theory that statehood is predicated upon recognition by other states, as the State of Palestine has received formal recognition from 139 countries since declaring independence in 1988.

6. To fulfil Australia's moral responsibility (Australia specific)

H.V Evatt, former Leader of the Australian Labor Party, was instrumental in the development and adoption of the UN Partition Plan as Chairman of the UN Ad Hoc Committee on the Palestinian Question in 1947. The Partition Plan was rejected by the majority of Palestinians for its blatant unfairness (55% of Palestine was allocated for the creation of a Jewish state, despite Jews only representing one-third of the total population) and civil unrest followed its adoption by the UNGA in 1947. The situation escalated into full-scale war in 1948. The Partition Plan explicitly forbids the expropriation of land owned by either state but, by the end of the war, Zionist armed forces had seized 78% of historic Palestine for the newly established Israeli state, and forcefully displaced over 750,000 Palestinians from their homes.

Evatt has cited his belief in the “justice of the Jewish case” as his motivation for the role he played in spearheading the Partition Plan, however, as expressed by former ALP Foreign Minister Gareth Evans, “the righting of a grievous wrong done to Jewish people does not justify a grievous wrong done to Palestinian people”. Given Evatt’s legacy, Australia has a specific and direct moral responsibility to the Palestinian people. Recognising the State of Palestine is the least Australia can do to right this historical wrong, and to secure the statehood which was promised to the Palestinian people by the UN Partition Plan.

7. To show principled leadership, as a good international citizen

Being a good international citizen requires compliance with international law, support for multilateralism, a willingness to pitch in to international tasks, and international good deeds. Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand have a further duty to assist burdened societies with not only short-term solutions, but long-term development and state-building efforts.

8. To align with Australia's/Aotearoa Aotearoa New Zealand's national values

Recognising the State of Palestine is a human rights issue. In June 2023, the UN Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices found, “the clearest evidence it has seen in its 55-year history of Israeli policies that systematically violate the human rights of the Palestinian people,” and UN experts report, “decades of record-high numbers of Palestinian deaths and injuries in the occupied territory.” Israel’s brutal 16-year blockade of the Gaza Strip is ongoing, and ultranationalist Israeli Ministers have been openly calling to wipe out Palestinian villages and assassinate “thousands” of Palestinians. Recognising the State of Palestine would send a powerful message that Australia/Aotearoa New Zealand does not condone Israel’s ongoing gross human rights violations, aligning with both states’ long-held commitment to upholding international principles and values of human rights, justice, dignity, equality.

1.3 Positions of Pacific Nations

In the Pacific, we have full diplomatic relations with Vanuatu and Timor-Leste, both of which recognise the State of Palestine and support Palestinian rights. Papua New Guinea has taken a decision to establish an embassy in Jerusalem in 2023, in clear violation of international law and UN Security Council and General Assembly resolutions on Israel’s illegal annexation of East Jerusalem. The new government of Fiji also intends to establish an embassy in Jerusalem.

In addition, the growing movement of Zionist Christian religious trends in some of these countries and their access to leadership positions, which support Israel and consider “united Jerusalem” as the capital of Israel as a result of Jewish beliefs and legends. Additionally, diplomatic and aid coordination from Arab countries to Pacific Islands is not as well established as Israel’s diplomatic and economic relations with these countries. This has also contributed to the weakness of these countries’ support for Palestinian rights.

Traditionally, most Pacific Island Countries (PICs) have not supported the sovereignty of the Palestinian people, represented by their voting behaviour in UNGA resolutions. Prior to the conflict in Gaza since October 2023, a few key resolutions exemplify the foreign policy of Pacific Island states. In the 2012 UNGA resolution 67/19 to upgrade Palestine to non-member observer status, Micronesia, Marshall Islands, Nauru and Palau voted against, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu voted abstained, and Kiribati did not vote.

Further, in the previous two yearly UNGA Resolutions on ‘The right of the Palestinian people to self-determination’, there was disproportionate representation from Pacific Islands countries voting against. In 2021, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru and Palau voted against, only to be joined by Israel and the US. The same resolution in 2022 had almost identical against votes, except Palau who abstained.

2. Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip

2.1 Positions of Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand

Since the beginning of the war in the Gaza Strip, Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand have sided with Israel, in line with the US and European position. The two countries expressed Israel’s right to self-defence following the Hamas-led attacks on settlements around the Gaza Strip. The two governments strongly condemned Operation Al-Aqsa Flood, emphasising that Hamas is a terrorist organisation. They have also supported Israel’s continuation of its war and did not support calls for an unconditional ceasefire.

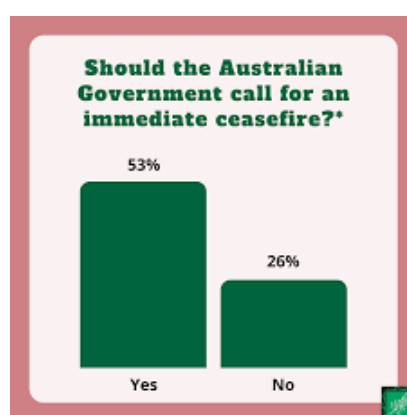


However, weeks after the onset of the Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip, the two countries voted in favour of the UN General Assembly resolution for an immediate ceasefire and supported the Security Council resolution for a temporary pause. Both countries also expressed their support for the application of international humanitarian law and the protection of civilians in the Gaza Strip. The two governments also denounced the forced displacement of the population of the Gaza Strip and its reoccupation by Israel.



In addition, both governments emphasised the importance and necessity of adequate, permanent and sustained humanitarian access to the Gaza Strip. They have also emphasised the importance of a political solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, especially the implementation of the two-state solution. In the same context, the two governments condemned the attacks carried out by settlers in the West Bank and Jerusalem, calling on the Israeli government to put an end to extremist attacks in occupied Palestine and implement international law.

These positions come against the backdrop of massive demonstrations organised in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand in support of the Palestinian people, especially in the face of the genocide carried out by the Israeli occupation forces in the Gaza Strip. They also come amid widespread condemnation in both countries of the Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip and public calls for an immediate ceasefire. More than 56% of the Australian and Aotearoa New Zealand public supported a permanent ceasefire in Gaza. This number includes hundreds of journalists, writers, intellectuals and academics in Australia called on the government to call for an immediate ceasefire.



The clear positions announced by the Group of Heads of Diplomatic Missions of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the Arab Ambassadors Council and the Palestinian Embassy in Canberra, in addition to the Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand public support to Gaza, had a clear impact on changing the position of the Australian and Aotearoa New Zealand governments towards a more balanced stance towards the Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip.

Australia's Position: Context

However, Australia's position on Israel's aggression in Gaza has been influenced by social divisions which have occurred within Australian society after the conflict began. Heated divergence between Australia's sizable Islamic, Arab and Palestinian communities and the Jewish community have threatened the social, harmony and compatibility between all components of the multicultural Australian society. This has been a particular worry for the Australian government and has thus been reflected in its foreign policy decisions

Despite public support for the Palestinian cause in Australia and the leeway given to a humanitarian ceasefire, etc, its foreign policy position has continued to be tempered and remains mostly supportive of Israel's self-defence narrative.

Palestinian, Arab and Muslim community's organisations have denounced Australia's pro-Israeli stance, especially the failure to condemn the Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip, and the failure to call for an immediate ceasefire. Australia's position has caused the ruling Labor Party to lose many of its supporters in the Muslim, Arab and Palestinian communities who are moving to support the Greens Party in the upcoming elections because of its principled stance on the Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip.

The relationship between Muslim and Arab communities and the Labor Party is crumbling due to the growing perception that it has taken their electorate for granted and their concerns about the war in Gaza are not being reflected in policy. The community's opinion is that despite increased criticism of Israel's offensive in Gaza, Australia's official position falls short of what is necessary. There have also been Greens MPs who have publicly criticised the Labor party for being complicit in genocide. Claims against the Labor party from a crucial component of their constituency are mounting in their intensity and pose a problem for maintaining enough support for the next election in 2025.

Adding fuel to the fire, Australian "arms and ammunitions" exports to Israel have totalled \$13 million AUD over the past five years, including \$2.3 million in 2022. While Foreign Minister Penny Wong has stated that "Australia has not supplied weapons to Israel since the start of the Hamas-Israeli conflict," this data supports the disdain for the Australian government's position on Israel's foreign operations.

The Labor government in Australia was forced to take a compromising and unclear position due to the pressures it came from the powerful pro-Israel lobby in Australia, as well as pressure from the Australian opposition, led by the conservative Liberal Party, which took a strongly pro-Israeli stance. The Liberal opposition criticised the Australian government for its lack of a completely unwavering support for Israel's cause, especially its vote in favour of the UN General Assembly resolution for a permanent ceasefire. The Australian opposition has called for the elimination of Hamas and is in favour of Israel continuing its aggression on the Gaza Strip until its objectives are fully achieved. This is a reflection of the centre-right Coalition opposition upholding Australia's traditional alliance with the US-led Western bloc.

Lastly, and to convey the most recent sentiment from Canberra, Australia, with the Prime Ministers of Aotearoa New Zealand and Canada, released a joint statement on February 15, 2024, warning Israel against invading Rafah City.

While Australia has supported Israel's right to self-defence, its strongest statement against the explicit operations of Israel are as follows:

“We urge the Israeli government not to go down this path. There is simply nowhere else for civilians to go.”

“Israel must listen to its friends and it must listen to the international community. The protection of civilians is paramount and a requirement under international humanitarian law. Palestinian civilians cannot be made to pay the price of defeating Hamas.”

Aotearoa New Zealand's Position: Context

Aotearoa New Zealand has generally followed suit with Australia's position on the war in Gaza. They have equally taken a very measured approach, which accounts for their diplomatic alliance with Israel and their respect for international humanitarian law and human rights. To begin, Aotearoa New Zealand continues to condemn the attacks by Hamas on October 7th and uphold the right of Israel to defend itself.

In spite of the election of the conservative National party in October 2023, Aotearoa New Zealand has continued to abide by international law and has joined Australia and Canada in their condemnation of Israel's targeting of civilians.

In February 2024, Prime Minister Luxon said in a statement that the attacks by Hamas on Israel ‘were brutal and we have unequivocally condemned them.’ In the same statement, Luxon announced that it would list Hamas as a terrorist entity, however the designation of Hamas is ‘not a reflection on the Palestinian people in Gaza and around the world’.

Importantly too, Aotearoa New Zealand asserts that how Israel defends itself matters, stating on official government websites that, “Military objectives cannot be used to justify ‘any and all’ actions in this conflict”. This sentiment can also be seen in the aforementioned joint statement by Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand and Canada urging Israel not to conduct a military operation in Rafah.

Luxon also voiced that he was ‘seriously concerned by the significant increase in extremist violence perpetrated by Israeli settlers’ against Palestinians in recent months. This is consistent with Aotearoa New Zealand's position that Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories violate international law. In this context, the government will continue to support a future Palestinian state within a negotiated two-state agreement.

2.2 Position of Timor-Leste

Timor-Leste has condemned of the killing of Palestinian civilians, while condemning the Al-Aqsa flood operation at the same time.

José Ramos-Horta, President of Timor-Leste, criticised the parties involved for their responsibility for the loss of civilian lives in the armed conflict between Hamas and Israel and questioned the credibility of the United Nations over the crisis.

He expressed that the “Indiscriminate killing of non-combatants, civilians, of women and children, perpetrated by whoever, anywhere, is abhorrent, must be unequivocally condemned...Without hesitation or ambiguity, we condemn every and any act of indiscriminate violence and killing of civilians.”

“The legitimate cause of a functioning Palestinian state is severely jeopardised by Hamas’ apparent indiscriminate attacks, kidnappings and executions, and any political or ideological justification for the indiscriminate killing of civilians must be rejected.”



President Ramos-Horta also criticised Prime Minister Netanyahu, saying that his policies of blatantly expanding Israeli colonial settlements in defiance of international law and UN Security Council resolutions have aroused Palestinian resentment and anger and contributed to a radical exacerbation of the crisis.

He has continued to articulate that Israel’s flagrant rejection of the two-state solution “poses a serious reputation challenge to the UNSC and perpetuates a profound injustice”.

This sentiment has remained unchanged since October. Using his Facebook account to comment on the insufficient operations of the UNSC on January 12, 2024, President Ramos-Horta stated: “what about the carpet bombing of Gaza, the death of over 20,000 Palestinians, 80% of whom are children, elderly and hospital patients? Will the UNSC wake up from this deep moral hibernation?”

Additionally, in the 55th session of the UN Human Rights Council in February 2024, Timorese Minister of Social Solidarity and Inclusion expressed “deep concern” for the “catastrophic humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip” and emphasised “the importance of protecting all civilian populations following international humanitarian law”. In this context, the Timorese minister reiterated Timor-Leste’s support for a two-state solution.

Lastly, again using his Facebook account to share an article on the War in Gaza, President Ramos-Horta lamented on March 8, 2024: “If this story doesn't make you angry and cry then you have lost your soul, your humanity. I can dump "aid" from the air to hide my humiliating impotence to stop the "killing fields" of Gaza and feed dying Palestinians; we can no longer pretend to have any courage by holding another Arab summit of indignant leaders; I am disgusted, I am numb, at our loss of humanity. We have become zombies of indifference.”

2.3 Position of Papua New Guinea

The position of the government of Papua New Guinea was characterised by its support for Israel and its vote against the UN General Assembly resolution for a ceasefire. This is in line with its recent establishment of an embassy in West Jerusalem and its recognition of unified Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.



Papua New Guinea have signalled that they are staunch allies of Israel, furthermore by their decision to open a consulate in a Jewish settlement in the occupied West Bank.

Concerning the War in Gaza, Papua New Guinea's Prime Minister James Marape condemned the attack on Israel, saying "war-related violence is not a sign of the times." He continued, noting that "In this day and age, we condemn attacks on each other to resolve conflicts."



"In a world where the modern family of nations comes together under the UN Charter and human rights norms, any issues that arise between us and each other must be resolved through peaceful means, and Papua New Guinea has done this since 2001 when we came to the table to peacefully resolve the Bougainville conflict. So, we want to encourage Hamas and others who feel aggrieved in matters relating to the State of Israel to resolve these issues through negotiations that can lead to a peaceful outcome. If they engage in war and acts of terrorism, their response will equal the violence they have committed." He stated: "War begets war and

conflict begets conflict.” Marape also urged Israel to consider its response, saying it must not lead to further loss of life.



To give context to Papua New Guinea’s close relationship with Israel, the decision is two pronged, involving both financial and religious ties. Firstly, Israel’s technical innovations in agriculture, finance, water and health have resulted in significant improvements in living standards for Israelis. This is an attractive prospect for Marape and it is suspected he is interested in the delivrance of aid and support for these sectors by Israel if he deepens their diplomatic relationship.

Secondly, Marape has commented on deep-rooted Abrahamic links between the Christian Papuans and the Holy Land. “For us to call ourselves Christian, paying respect to God will not be complete without recognising that Jerusalem is the universal capital of the people and the nation of Israel. He aspires to make PNG “the richest black Christian nation on earth”. As such his desire for financial prosperity and religious obligation are intertwined in supporting PNG’s deepening relationship with Israel.

2.4 Position of Fiji

Throughout the conflict, Fiji has supported Israel’s offensive, which has been reflected in its voting behaviour in the UN and other international institutions. Firstly, Fiji voted against the October UNGA resolution calling for an “immediate and sustained” humanitarian truce and cessation of hostilities, condemning “all acts of violence aimed at Palestinian and Israeli civilians” and “demands that all parties immediately and fully comply with their obligations under international law”.



Secondly, Fiji was the only other nation than the United States to defend Israel's occupation of Palestine in the International Court of Justice in February 2024. The UN General Assembly asked the ICJ to issue an Advisory Opinion about the legal implications of Israel's "policies and practices" in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza. Within their written and oral statements to the court, Fiji argued that this request is inappropriate given it is "one-sided". It lamented that the Court must not ignore the rights of Israel, nor the responsibilities of the Palestinian people. The one-sided narrative, Fiji argued, fails to account for complexity of the dispute and distorts the legal, historical and political context.

The explicit reasons Fiji provided are, firstly, that the request circumvents existing legally binding framework for resolution of the Israel-Palestine dispute. Secondly, for the ICJ to give an opinion "would have the effect of circumventing the principle that a State is not obliged to allow its disputes to be submitted to judicial settlement without its consent". Third, given the request is deemed to be one sided, the court will not have accurate and reliable information it would need to produce an opinion on the questions posed.



Sweeping assumptions were also made by Fiji within its written statement. Firstly, it assumes that given the right to self-determination requires the will of the people, the Palestinians have not demonstrated this "as a result of the failure of Palestinian leaders to hold elections for the last 16 years". It also assumes that an overwhelming number of Palestinians (the statement uses the term Arabs) prefer Israeli rule in East Jerusalem, contrary to many public opinion surveys. Regardless, Israeli annexation of East Jerusalem is recognised by no state and was deemed "null and void" by the United Nations Security Council in 1980.

This staunch support for Israel is not a nation-wide opinion, however. It has been criticised by civil society groups, and notably Fiji's ex-Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama. He argued that Fiji's stance "insults the intelligence of every Fijian" and that it undoes Fiji's long-standing commitment to neutrality, peacekeeping, and the principles of self-determination and decolonisation.

"The coalition government's claim that the occupation of foreign territory by Israel is legal - an argument not even advanced by Israel itself - reveals a disturbing truth that Fiji's voice to the world is hostage to a demented few who are hellbent on destroying our national reputation," Bainimarama said in a statement.

Throughout the conflict, Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka expressed his condolences to the Israeli and Palestinian people, saying “We are deeply saddened by the loss of life and suffering endured by both Israelis and Palestinians as a result of the ongoing conflict, our thoughts and prayers go out to all those affected during this difficult challenge.”

The Government of Fiji urges all parties involved to seek a peaceful resolution to the conflict and calls for an immediate cessation of hostilities to prevent further loss of life and suffering.

Prime Minister Rabuka concluded: “Our thoughts are with all those affected by this crisis, and we will continue to stand by the 200 Fijians in Israel to ensure their safety and well-being.” Following this, more than 198 Fijians arrived at Nadi International Airport October 12th, 2023, on a Fiji Airways return flight from Israel. Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka, who came to the airport to personally welcome the returnees, expressed his gratitude and relief at their safe return.



2.5 Position of Vanuatu

Palestine and Vanuatu maintain formal diplomatic relations. Vanuatu’s voting within the UNGA on resolutions concerning Palestine has generally been in favour of self-determination, however there are inconsistencies. In 2012, Vanuatu abstained from voting to upgrade Palestine to non-member observer status, however in 2022, it voted in favour of the yearly UNGA resolution affirming the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination.

Concerning the War in Gaza, Vanuatu abstained in the UNGA resolution which sought to protect civilians and uphold legal and humanitarian obligations. In the preceding UNGA resolution which called for an immediate ceasefire, however, Vanuatu voted in favour.

Vanuatu’s foreign ministry has not been vocal on the War in Gaza since October 2023. No comments or publications have been released from the Prime Minister either. Vanuatu’s largest media outlet, the *Vanuatu Daily Post*, has mostly ignored the conflict also. Two opinion pieces have been released however, one in support of Israel and one outlining the Palestinian case.

2.6 Positions of other Pacific Nations

Pacific nations (Fiji, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu, and

Vanuatu) cast more “no” votes in the two UN General Assembly resolutions concerning the assault on Gaza than any other region in the world.

Concerning the resolution adopted on 26 October 2023 [A/RES/ES-10/21] regarding the protection of civilians and upholding legal and humanitarian obligations: the only Pacific Island states to vote in favour of this resolution were the Solomon Islands and Timor-Leste. Of the 14 total “No” votes, six (42.8%) were cast by Pacific nations; specifically, Fiji, the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Papua New Guinea and Tonga. Meanwhile, Kiribati, Palau, Tuvalu and Vanuatu abstained, and Samoa did not cast a vote.

The next UNGA resolution [A/RES/ES-10/22] was adopted on 12 December 2023 by a vote of 153 in favour to just 10 against, with 23 abstentions. This resolution demanded an immediate humanitarian ceasefire, compliance with international legal obligations, immediate and unconditional release of all hostages, as well as ensuring humanitarian access. Pacific voting trends were slightly more positive for this resolution: the Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru and Papua New Guinea again voted “No”, while the Marshall Islands, Palau and Tonga abstained, and Kiribati did not vote, but Fiji, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu voted “Yes”. While there were considerably more Pacific votes in favour of this resolution, “Yes” votes were cast by less than half of all Pacific states (a proportion lower than any other region in the world), and Pacific states cast 30% of all “No” votes.

COUNTRY	VOTING RECORD	
	A/RES/ES-10/21	A/RES/ES-10/22
Fiji	No	Yes
Kiribati	Abstention	-
Marshall Islands	No	Abstention
Micronesia (Federated States of)	No	No
Nauru	No	No
Palau	Abstention	Abstention
Papua New Guinea	No	No
Samoa	-	Yes
Solomon Islands	Yes	Yes
Timor-Leste	Yes	Yes
Tonga	No	Abstention
Tuvalu	Abstention	Yes
Vanuatu	Abstention	Yes
TOTALS:	Yes = 2 No = 6 Abstention = 4 Non-voting = 1	Yes = 6 No = 3 Abstention = 3 Non-voting = 1

While US political influence is often pinpointed in explanations of this voting behaviour, there are many other states (such as Australia and the UK) which abstained and others who voted in favour of the resolution. The concentration of “no” votes from the Pacific can be understood in the context of the increasingly potent influence of Christian Evangelicals in the region. Support for Israel in the region is often a deeply held religious belief, and accordingly is held in high regard and consideration when these states form their foreign policies.

However, the power politics argument cannot be cast aside entirely: the foreign policies of these Pacific states have certainly also been informed by loyalties to the United States, especially given the US and China's intensive ongoing geopolitical competition over influence in the Pacific. Consider that Papua New Guinea, which voted against both resolutions, signed a security pact with the US only months earlier, in May 2023.

The Pacific Islands Forum

The Pacific Islands Forum maintains a close relationship with Israel, which has impacted its stance on Israel's offensive in Gaza. In October 2023, Benjamin Netanyahu held a diplomatic meeting with Henry Puna, former Prime Minister of the Cook Islands and current Secretary-General of the Pacific Islands Forum. Subsequently, Puna stated that Netanyahu "offered help with our fisheries, our management, our water issues, agriculture, promising to send a high-level delegation of officials that are experts in those areas to see how they could help with the Pacific...they've been very helpful to us". Further, Samoa, Tonga and Fiji citizens enjoy visa-free travel to Israel in exchange for visa-free travel to these countries by Israelis.

Indeed, the Israel-Pacific friendship is continuing to strengthen as Israel has submitted a bid to become a dialogue member of the Pacific Islands Forum. This position would expand its influence and lobbying power in the region to an even greater extent. However, Henry Puna has stated that he is "not concerned at all" about any influence Israel has over Pacific Islands countries. Regarding the war in Gaza, Puna noted that "We are a region of peace, and we want to keep it that way. We are friends to all and enemy to no one".

Israel's relationship with the Pacific Islands is characterised by Israel providing millions of dollars in aid and infrastructure development to PICs in exchange for diplomatic recognition and support in international organisations for their foreign policy. This is clearly observed in their voting behaviour within the UN, and while arguments have been made by the Pacific Islands Forum that convey a balanced diplomatic approach to the Israel-Hamas War, generally PICs are supportive of Israel.

Pro-Palestine demonstrations were held outside the 52nd Pacific Islands Forum held in the Cook Islands in November 2023. However, after the official Forum Communiqué outlining discussion points was released, there was no mention of the situation in Gaza. Silence on this front speaks louder than the audible demonstrations that occurred simultaneously.



3. Foreign Policy

3.1 Australia's Foreign Policy

Australia's relationship with China



Australian-Chinese relations are still tense despite some recent detente, especially with China's lifting of some economic sanctions on the import of some Australian goods, the visit of Australia's Foreign Minister Penny Wong and Prime Minister Albanese's visit to China in November 2023.



Anthony Albanese and Penny Wong re-enact the famous picture of Gough Whitlam at the Echo Wall at the Temple of Heaven in Beijing. Photograph: Reuters

It does not seem that a breakthrough in these relations will occur in the short term given the large collection of military and intelligence alliances between Australia and its Western allies. Primarily, the Five Eyes alliance with Aotearoa New Zealand, the United States, United Kingdom and Canada, and the Quad partnership with the United States, India and Japan. Most prominently recently, the AUKUS alliance with the United States, and United Kingdom. Under AUKUS, Australia intends to purchase nuclear-powered submarines from both the United States and Britain at a cost of between \$268 and \$368 billion AUD between now and the mid-2050s. These efforts are aligned with Australia strategy to both become the preferred security

partner for Pacific states, as well as a deterrence strategy against China. It's persistent military build-up and violation of international law in the South China Sea, and its explicit threat to absorb Taiwan by force are key motivators. From Australia's perspective, the Pacific too is under threat from Chinese expansion.

This military advantage gained by Australia through AUKUS is both the most significant challenge to Chinese dominance in the region to date, but also signifies the US strategic shift away from Europe towards the Asia-Pacific region. While AUKUS is primarily focused on China, it is also a method of maintaining US engagement in the Pacific. Given US foreign policy in the Pacific is of crucial importance to Australia's, AUKUS as a long-term investment in ensuring American politics stays engaged in these international matters is paramount to Australia. While Australia does not have the political weight to expressly influence the US, it can contribute to the pressures that drive Washington's foreign policy decision making; AUKUS can be considered a component of these efforts. Indeed, Australia's upcoming submarine fleet alone lacks the ability to deter Chinese expansion into the Pacific; it is designed to augment US presence.

This is reflective of Australia's traditionally close foreign policy alignment with the US. This importantly has a clear implication for the future of Australian-Palestinian relations. Given the ironclad alliance between the US and Israel, Australia may be beholden to maintain friendly diplomacy with America through aligning its foreign policy preferences in exchange for progress on the Palestinian issue.

China views AUKUS and other alliances in the Pacific and Indian Ocean region with great concern, describing them as reminiscent of NATO but in the Pacific and Indian Ocean region, which, in China's view, will lead to the militarisation of the region and disrupt international peace and security.

The rest of Southeast Asia is also wary of this military alliance, calling for a reduction and mitigation of the current strategic competition between China and the United States. They believe that this strategic rivalry could lead to armed conflicts and instability in this important region of the world.

Notably, Australian Prime Minister Albanese called for a reduction in the political and military polarisation between China and the United States during his speech at the Shangri-La Conference in Singapore, which discussed defence and security issues in the Pacific and Indian Ocean region.

This discussion is particularly important considering the current escalating tension over the future of Taiwan, which China considers to be a component of its sovereign territory and demands to incorporate it in accordance with the "One China" policy. Countries in the region, led by the United States, Australia and Japan, are calling for a peaceful solution to the issue without military intervention by China, however, China is prepared to use military force to annex Taiwan and is determined to do so.

Further, however, Australia's Foreign Minister Penny Wong has indicated that "Australia will not intervene militarily alongside the United States if it enters into a war with China over the future of Taiwan." Southeast Asian countries have also taken the same position within the framework of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

The wider geopolitical context also includes China's flagrant extension of its sovereignty far south into the South China Sea and the competition which has risen from this, China's "Belt and Road" initiative that promotes Chinese trade to all parts of the world, as well as the healthy political, military and economic relations between China and Pacific countries. It is also worth noting China's growing political and economic influence in the Middle East and Africa and the competition this creates for the United States who also seeks to exert influence in the regions.

Lastly, India's geopolitical position must be considered. It maintained a non-aligned position with China and an alliance with the United States, Australia and Japan in the framework of the Quad alliance. Here, the US and India have conflicting interests concerning China and the Indo-Pacific region. As such, the US has a fundamental interest in maintaining healthy relations with India to maintain a regional balance of power against China.

Australia's engagement with ASEAN on Palestine

Australia engages with ASEAN in a broad capacity by way of acting as a middle power within the Asia Pacific Region. In 2021, Australia became one of ASEAN's first Comprehensive Strategic Partners, denoting an upgraded and more enhanced relationship. Australia is committed to building robust and lasting strategic, economic and cultural links. This was showcased in March 2024 as Melbourne hosted a special summit to mark 50 years of official relations between ASEAN and Australia. During this summit, ASEAN nations and Australia called for an "immediate and durable" ceasefire in Gaza. "We reiterate our shared concern about the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza," the leaders said in a joint statement, dubbed the Melbourne Declaration.

Indeed, the Israel-Palestine conflict is significant concerning Australia's relationship with Indonesia, the largest and most populous ASEAN member. It is imperative for Australia to maintain a healthy diplomatic and economic relationship with Indonesia given it is Australia's largest and most significant immediate neighbour. Given the Israel-Palestine issue is an imperative component of Indonesia's foreign policy values, Australia must therefore behave accordingly. Hosting the largest Muslim population on earth, Indonesia is a staunch ally of the Palestinian State and does not recognise Israel as legitimate. Indeed, Indonesia has stated that the conflict is an important factor in maintaining a healthy relationship with Australia.



The waters were tested in 2018 when Scott Morrison planned to move Australia's embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. After protests from the Indonesian government, the decision was

reversed. Under the Labor government however, Australia's foreign policy does not seem to be at risk of provoking Indonesia. As demonstrated through the Melbourne Declaration, Australia is committed to healthy collaboration with ASEAN as a diplomatic platform to discuss the Palestinian issue.

Australia's relationship with Pacific Island Countries

Australia upholds a deep and developed relationship with PICs. This relationship is viewed in two parts, firstly through diplomatic, cultural, and people-to-people connections, and secondly within the context of China's growing influence in the region. Australia is invested in bolstering the development of PICs. This is intended to support the sovereignty, security and stability for the Pacific region, which aligns with Australia's interests also. Indeed, Australia remains the region's largest development partner.

Australia's 2023-24 Budget includes a comprehensive investment into the Pacific region. Foreign Minister Penny Wong claimed it is 'a transformational package of support to the Pacific to respond to Pacific priorities and ensure our shared interests in a peaceful, prosperous and resilient region.' Australia's budget for Official Development Assistance (ODA) to the Pacific entails a \$1.9 billion investment over 5 years comprised of four components. The top recipients are as follows: Papua New Guinea receiving \$616.2 million, Solomon Islands receiving \$171.3 million, Fiji receiving \$88.1 million, and Vanuatu receiving \$84.6 million.

Firstly, investments in 'Pacific peace and security' are priced at \$1.4 billion, channelling primarily into the defence and security portfolios of Pacific Islands nations, improving security infrastructure and maritime security capability. Secondly, Australia will invest \$370.8 million into its Pacific Australia Labour Mobility scheme, which allows Australian businesses to hire workers from 9 Pacific Islands countries and Timor-Leste in sectors where there are workforce shortages. Thirdly, \$114.3 million will be invested into "Pacific regional utility". This is achieved by supporting the development of regional architecture that will assist in the provision of humanitarian relief and in disaster preparedness. Lastly, \$89.5 million aims to 'deepen Pacific connections.' This includes improving access to Australian media, primarily the ABC, strengthening sporting ties and investing in education and social protection systems.

Much of Australia's recent collaboration with PICs, however, has been in the context of China's growing influence in the region. The Pacific region is of particular importance to Australia given its vulnerability to political domination by larger powers and its closeness to Australia's borders. Australian political commentary of PICs is often founded on concepts of weakness and potential state collapse. It is regularly concluded that Australia must take proactive measures to mitigate, control or prevent weakness from becoming a broader problem both for PICs themselves and for Australia's own interests.

This framing of these states also reinforces how Australia has responded to China's growing presence. Australia functions on a deeply held assumption that PICs are in no position to resist China as its presence grows. Its economic weakness, developmental issues and vulnerability to climate change minimises its bargaining power to choose partnerships. China, an economic behemoth, thus threatens Australia as the 'partner of choice' for the Pacific. Australia has therefore responded proactively to make itself a more attractive security partner.

Crucially, upon the election of the Labor government in 2022, Australia's relationship with the Pacific became the forefront of its foreign policy. During Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong's first visit to the region, she stressed that Australia plans to improve upon the strategy of the previous Coalition government and step up on climate change.

3.2 Aotearoa New Zealand's Foreign Policy

Aotearoa New Zealand's relationship with China

Aotearoa New Zealand retains a slightly different position than Australia concerning relations with China. Aotearoa New Zealand has continued its healthy relations with China despite geopolitical tensions in the region and China's human rights record, especially their dehumanising treatment of the Uighur Muslim minority in Xinjiang. However, Aotearoa New Zealand has taken a pragmatic stance towards its relationship with China, especially with regard to trade relations. It has also taken a clear position against the militarisation of the region, especially Australia's entry into the AUKUS agreement.

In this context, Aotearoa New Zealand has a policy that is relatively independent from the United States, maintaining unfaltering support for international law and multilateral institutions. There are no indicators that this position will change with the election of the Conservative National Party in October 2023. Trade was said to be an important factor in the new government's policy. Indeed, China is Aotearoa New Zealand's largest trading partner by a significant margin, valued at NZ\$27.75 billion.

In December 2022, a Chinese state-owned newspaper hailed the healthy relations between China and Aotearoa New Zealand. Additionally, during visits to China by ex-Prime Ministers Chris Hipkins in 2023 and Jacinda Ardern in 2019, Xi Jinping reportedly said that China-Aotearoa New Zealand relations have long been a pacesetter in China's relations with developed countries. Further, Aotearoa New Zealand was the only Five Eyes country to join China's Belt and Road Initiative in 2018, and bilateral trade relations have continued to be healthy.

However, during 2023, the relationship seems to have strained. Reports of less-than-courteous diplomatic interactions have come to light after Aotearoa New Zealand Foreign Minister's June 2023 visit to Beijing, and the Chinese Embassy in Wellington strongly objected to assessments of Aotearoa New Zealand's defence concerning China by its Intelligence Service. This slight change in relations comes in hand with concerns over China's military build-up, expanded regional influence and perceived aspirations of hegemonic status.

This environment is reflected in a key foreign policy speech delivered by ex-Prime Minister Chris Hipkins in July 2023. He noted:

“Aotearoa New Zealand's national interests require continued engagement with China, and cooperation where our interests converge. Certainly, our economic interests are significant. But there are other ways in which China challenges our national interests and in these areas we will disagree.”

Aotearoa New Zealand also published four strategic policy documents in quick succession in 2023 which explicitly signalled a shift in Aotearoa New Zealand's strategic and defence

policies. They signal that, like its security partners, it now also views China as a threat to the peace and stability of the Indo-Pacific region. This new orientation on China has been supported by its security partners including the US, Australia, India and Japan. Indeed, there have been discussions about potential participation in some aspects of AUKUS, a deal Aotearoa New Zealand was once critical of. As such, while China and Aotearoa New Zealand maintain healthy economic ties, in 2023 Aotearoa New Zealand begun following suit of its allies by taking measures to oppose China's growing security presence.

Aotearoa New Zealand's relationship with Pacific Island Countries

Aotearoa New Zealand maintains an especially close relationship with PICs. It engages with the region through multiple regional organisations including the Pacific Islands Forum, the Pacific Community, the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme, the University of the South Pacific, and the Forum Fisheries Agency. Indeed, Aotearoa New Zealand is a Pacific country connected deeply to the region through culture, history, politics, people, language and shared interests. Trade between Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific amounted to NZD\$3.62 billion in 2018, of which NZD\$2.17 billion was exported from Aotearoa New Zealand and NZD\$1.45 billion was imported from the Pacific. Over 184 Aotearoa New Zealand exporters are active in the Pacific, with company exports ranging from NZD\$1 million to NZD\$200 million.

Aotearoa New Zealand, together with Australia, is part of the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations Plus (PACER Plus), which is a trade and development agreement seeking to improve living standards, create jobs, increase Pacific exports and deepen connections of Aotearoa New Zealand businesses in the Pacific. This is one of Aotearoa New Zealand's primary tools to promote regional economic integration. Given it is difficult achieve economies of scale in the Pacific to compete in international markets, PACER Plus seeks to create wealth in these countries and thus make it easier for these countries to trade.



Additionally, Aotearoa New Zealand assists in the development in Pacific businesses through initiatives such as Pacific Trade invest, Business Link Pacific, and the Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative. Joining Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand also finances the International Finance Corporation under the Pacific Partnership II to promote private sector

development. This initiative funds infrastructure, financial services, economic growth opportunities and women's economic empowerment, operating in Fiji, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu.

Aotearoa New Zealand's ODA is heavily focused on the Pacific region. Between 2022 and 2023, Aotearoa New Zealand channelled NZD\$971.5 million to the Pacific, which was the highest ever foreign aid expenditure in a single year. It commits at least 60% of its ODA to the Pacific region, and in 2022-23, 61% was allocated to the region. These funds are targeted toward bolstering development in vulnerable countries, gender equality, aid for trade initiatives, fiscal crisis financing, humanitarian support and climate initiatives.

Concerning the security of the Pacific, Aotearoa New Zealand Police, Customs and Immigration work closely with their Pacific counterparts to strengthen border security amidst prevailing levels of transnational crime in the region. Aotearoa New Zealand also provides monitoring, control and surveillance that aids PICs to protect their waters from illegal fishing. It also administers NZD\$2.7 million each year for their Pacific Security Fund. This supports ethical leadership training delivered by the Aotearoa New Zealand Defence Force and improves security capabilities of Pacific states. Lastly, Aotearoa New Zealand supports institutes which protect the Pacific Ocean, which is vital to the flourishing of PICs. These include the Office to the Pacific Ocean Commissioner and the Pacific Community Centre for Ocean Science. Both work to bolster coordination and knowledge dissemination on marine protection.

3.3 Pacific Nations' Foreign Policy

The Pacific as a Geopolitical Competition Hotspot

There exist 15 Pacific Island nation states and they constitute a sharp point of contention between the two superpowers, China and the United States, concerning influence in the region. The PICs are also of strategic importance to Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand due to their proximity, their historical relationship with both states, and Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand's security alliances with the United States.

Therefore, China's growing influence in the region constitutes a strategic issue for Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. Australia views itself as the guarantor of security in the region and, as an ally of the US and an opponent of China's geopolitical aspirations, it seeks to bolster its diplomatic and security relationships with the Pacific to counter China's influence. The United States has also deepened its diplomatic ties in the region with a bilateral security pact signed with Papua New Guinea in May 2023 intended to establish military bases on its territory.

China has established security agreements with some Pacific Island states, notably the recent agreement with the Solomon Islands in 2022, which was considered a direct threat to Australian national security and regional security. Indeed, there is speculation that undisclosed clauses allow the establishment of Chinese military bases on Solomon Islands territory.

The region is therefore characterised by larger powers attempting to forge deeper ties within. This not only comes in the form of security alliances, but also ODA and private sector funding.

Pacific Islands Countries' position on the security competition

PIC leaders argue that they are aware and capable of negotiating the challenges arising from China's increased presence in the region. Previous Secretary General of the Pacific Island Forum Dame Meg Taylor emphasised that PICs are not ingenuous to China's objectives, and immediate security concerns are primarily regarding climate change, not the possible construction of military bases. The previous Australian government's engagement with the Pacific left these priorities unaddressed and led them to engage with other partners, such as the Solomon Islands' security pact with China in 2022. As such, the current Labor government has included climate as a priority within their development engagement with Pacific states.

While AUKUS has been accepted as a necessity by some PICs, many are concerned it may weaken action on climate issues. In favour, the Micronesian President stated that he 'trusts that AUKUS is in the region's security interests' and that Australia will always observe nuclear non-proliferation. Fijian and Palauan Prime Ministers have also supported the deal. Palau's leader stated that Australia is 'making sure that we protect freedom and democracy and peace', going further to say that nuclear energy is an essential power source in our world.

Oppositely, Tuvaluan leaders have directly criticised AUKUS due to concerns of increased militarisation of the region and of the risky nature of nuclear power to human and environmental health. Kiribati president echoed this anxiety, speaking from experience when the US and UK tested nuclear weapons in Kiribati. In response, China have affirmed that they share Kiribati's trepidations, whereas Australia does not.

Similarly, former Fijian Prime Minister reiterated that the Pacific must be nuclear free and that AUKUS breaches this goal. The General Secretary of the Pacific Conference of Churches argued that the Pacific is 'the fish basket of the world' and that 'if one submarine comes in and something goes wrong and the nuclear waste from that submarine gets into our ocean, that's too much already.'

Former leaders of Palau, Tuvalu, Marshall Islands and Kiribati also argue that AUKUS violates the spirit of the Blue Pacific narrative and reveals a blatant ignorance to the climate threat that is embodied in the Boe Declaration, which Australia is signatory to.

While Australia now has a more climate focused foreign policy with a Labor government, its policies to curb China's growing presence are still at odds with PIC's priorities.



4. Domestic Political Context: Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand

4.1 The Australian Indigenous Voice Referendum



In October 2023, the current Australian Government conducted a referendum to give Indigenous people an independent voice through the formation of an independent advisory body in Australia's parliament and to formally recognise this in the Constitution. The referendum also intended to recognise Indigenous people as Australia's first peoples in the Constitution. However, the referendum failed to pass, and no changes were made.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are Australia's first inhabitants and have lived here for more than 65,000 years, but their unique status is not recognised in Australia's constitution. Aboriginal people suffer from marginalisation, extreme poverty and psychological issues caused by years of colonialism, racial discrimination, and white supremacy within key institutions. Aboriginal people speak a plethora of languages and are not politically consolidated to make serious policy changes. As such, the referendum was proposed to rectify these injustices.

The referendum posed the following: "A Proposed Law: to alter the Constitution to recognise the First Peoples of Australia by establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice. Do you approve this proposed alteration?" The Indigenous Voice proposal was intended to materialise through the formation of an advisory body made up of Indigenous representatives that will provide programmatic and policy input to decision makers on issues that affect the lives of Indigenous communities. Parliament would not have been obliged to implement these recommendations, and the proposed body would not have the power to make laws.

It should be noted that participation in the referendum was mandatory for those over the age of 18, and for the referendum to succeed it required a majority at the national level as well as a majority in at least four states (Double Majority).

Stances of different groups and parties

The Opposition, led by the Coalition of the Liberal and National parties, announced that they would vote "No" on the proposed constitutional amendment, arguing that such an amendment would create differences between the people of Australia, especially since, in their view, modern Australia was created and built by British colonists, migrants and Indigenous people, meaning that the civilisation, culture and heritage of Australia was shaped by the contributions of these groups combined. Some opposition representatives also expressed the view that this

amendment would not rectify any ailments to the current socio-economic reality of Aboriginals. Another judgement was that the Voice would give Indigenous people disproportionate power over policymaking. Many conservative voters also held the misguided view that the onus to improve the conditions of Aboriginal people was on them and enshrining an independent committee into the constitution was ‘giving them too much.’



“Not nearly enough information. The so-called Voice will not do anything to help outback Indigenous people only elite city Indigenous greedy people. We are one not two.”

- Female, 40-59

The Greens, on the other hand, voted in favour of the amendment as an important step to strengthen and empower Indigenous people. However, the main party adopting this approach was the incumbent Labor Party, which proposed this amendment in line with its pro-indigenous rights stance, in line with the principles of international law and human rights, and in support of indigenous self-determination and active participation in identifying the needs of their communities and increasing their participation in decision-making.

This proposal was crystallised in the Uluru Statement from the Heart, released in May 2017 by 250 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander personalities, which included building a better future for all Australians and including the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voice in the Australian Constitution.

As for the purpose of creating this advisory body, Anthony Albanese, Australia’s Prime Minister, noted that the representatives of The Voice would be selected by Indigenous communities without government appointments, that The Voice will be allowed to make suggestions and recommendations to the government, and that the government will seek advice from The Voice before developing independent Indigenous policies. The Australian Prime Minister also called on people to vote “yes” for a civilisation that is over 65,000 years old.



However, the most important aspect of these debates is the position of Indigenous people themselves. Opinion polls indicate that more than 80% of Indigenous people supported the referendum as an important step towards the right to self-determination and the restoration of their rights, especially land ownership.

Indigenous opponents argued that they are in favour of an agreement with the Australian government, reminiscent of Aotearoa New Zealand's Treaty of Waitangi, and not just a "voice" or an "advisory body", which was seen to be powerless and lacking legal protection.

Senator Lydia Thorpe, an Indigenous woman, opposed the proposal and withdrew from her party, the Greens, for agreeing to a referendum and voting 'yes' in favour of establishing an Indigenous voice. Thorpe noted that the Black Independence Movement, one of the representative Indigenous movements, had decided to vote 'no' on the referendum. She added that Indigenous sovereignty does not coexist with Crown sovereignty, and that Indigenous people have the original and sole sovereignty over these lands. She also pointed out that the Voice violates "ancient Indigenous protocols that call for the establishment of a self-determining body."



Senator Thorpe has consistently emphasised the importance of a treaty between the Australian government and Indigenous peoples rather than a 'voice referendum', as is the case in Aotearoa New Zealand. Thorpe went on to say that Indigenous people have never agreed to be governed by the colonial Australian government and that they "do not and will not give up."

"We don't want to be part of the colonial constitution and the attempt to control us and our land," she said. "We don't accept any colonial mechanism that still controls us, and that's what The Voice is ultimately about."



"I'd like to know why this has to be put in the constitution. If it doesn't work it can't be undone!"

- Male, 40-59

Senator Thorpe resigned from the Green Party in February to “promote and amplify the Black Sovereignty Movement,” and said in her announcement, “This country has a strong grassroots Black Sovereignty Movement, full of dedicated and committed warriors, and I want to fully represent this movement in Parliament.” Thorpe explained that Black Lives Matter sovereignty is “the ultimate power of the people who come from this land, which is us, the First Nations people throughout this country.”

“We have the right to empower ourselves through our structures, our lands, and our countries,” she said. “If you want true representation in this country, only the chiefs of those clans and nations can say yes.”

Outcome of the Voice Referendum

The referendum took place on October 14th, 2023, through dual voting, i.e. through federal voting as well as voting within all Australian states and territories. Unfortunately, 39.94% of the Australian population was in favour of the voice to parliament, while 60.06% were against it. The referendum failed at both the federal and state levels and the voice to parliament was not enshrined in the Australian constitution.



The results on the state and territory levels are as follows:

States/Territories	YES	NO
New South Wales	41.04%	58.96%
Victoria	45.85%	54.15%
Queensland	31.79%	68.21%
Western Australia	36.73%	63.27%
South Australia	35.83%	64.17%
Tasmania	41.06%	58.94%
Northern Territory	39.70%	60.30%
Australian Capital Territory	61.29%	38.71%

As observed from the data above, the Australian Capital Territory was the only state/territory to have a majority yes vote. Queensland was the most in favour of the no vote with 68.21% of

the state voting no. As such, the referendum failed the double majority threshold. Apart from failing nationwide, it also failed to reach a majority in at least four states/territories.

This was a crushing defeat for the incumbent Labor Party, which devoted a large number of resources to the referendum and campaigned heavily to convince the public to approve the amendment to the constitution. Most indigenous people considered the results of the referendum to be painful and disappointing.

There are many reasons why the majority did not vote in favour of an indigenous vote, the most important of which are:

- i. The campaign for a Yes vote failed in explaining to most of the population what this term meant. In fact, most of Australia's population did not understand what the consequences of this constitutional amendment would be, especially since the Australian public did not understand that this amendment was intended to abolish systematic discrimination against Indigenous people. The "Yes" campaign failed to provide sufficient and clear information to the population to fully inform them of what the amendment meant in real terms.
- ii. Rather than pinning the referendum's failure on a large population of "racist" views, many believed there were other ways to strengthen Indigenous rights without changing the constitution.
- iii. Some believed that giving Indigenous people a voice meant giving them more land through their ability to pass laws. Many landowners, especially those with coal deposits, feared that their property would be expropriated and given to Indigenous people.
- iv. Some believed that amending the constitution in the manner was counterintuitive, and that it would promote further divide and hinder reconciliation between Aboriginal people and the remainder of the population.
- v. Some Indigenous leaders reported that the main reason for the failure of the vote was the lack of effective prior consultation with Indigenous communities and grassroots frameworks.
- vi. The two major parties, Labor and Liberal, did not agree on the conduct of the referendum, and thus the sharp criticism by the Liberal Party and its partner in the Coalition, the Nationals, led to the failure of the affirmative vote. In fact, no referendum in Australia to date, especially a constitutional amendment, has been conducted without the two major parties agreeing on the outcome of the referendum.
- vii. A significant proportion of Indigenous people were not in favour of a vote because they wanted a binding treaty between the government and Indigenous people instead of just a committee to propose recommendations, which, in their view, is worthless.
- viii. The media and information distortion that occurred within the "No" campaign, especially on social media, misinformed the public. A narrative was circulated that the Indigenous voice was to cause fundamental changes in the lives of most Australians, as opposed to its intended purpose which was to only affect policy related to Indigenous Australians.
- ix. Many believed the voice favoured one group of people over others. In this context, they argued that Australian identity and culture has been shaped by three elements, Indigenous people, migrants, and British colonisers.

4.2 Australia's First Nations Foreign Policy, the Voice Referendum and Palestinian Statehood Recognition

While it failed to pass into legislation, the Voice Referendum in October 2023 can be considered a component of the Labor government's more intensive engagement with Australia's with First Nations people. Indeed, a 'First Nations foreign policy' was one of Labor's new key policy components when entering office in 2022. Foreign Minister Penny Wong stated it seeks to "deliver a First Nations foreign policy that weaves the voices and practices of the world's oldest continuing culture into the way we talk to the world."

The policy's tenets are to appoint an Ambassador for First Nations people and establish an Office of First Nations Engagement within DFAT. As such, the interests of Indigenous Australians will be embedded into foreign policy to increase trade and investment into First Nations' communities, but most importantly to contribute to First Nations rights globally. This is especially important given a foreign policy such as this will have inextricable links to the Palestinian struggle for self-determination. It has the potential to act as a springboard for Australia to recognise Palestinian statehood.

Regardless of its failure, the Voice Referendum, coinciding with Israel's assault on Gaza in October 2023, brought upon an opportune time to embrace solidarity between Palestinians for First Nations Australians. While Australia does not currently recognise Palestinian statehood, the Labor government is in a rare position where it can utilise its new First Nations foreign policy to recognise Palestinian statehood amidst charged pro-Palestinian public sentiment.

4.3 Aotearoa New Zealand's 2023 Elections

Aotearoa New Zealand's National Party won its general election on October 14th, 2023, however, it needed to cooperate with ACT Aotearoa New Zealand and the Aotearoa New Zealand First party to form the new government. The National Party won 38% of the vote, equating to 50 seats. Opposingly, the Labour Party, led by former Prime Minister Chris Hipkins won only 27% of the vote, equating to 34 seats. ACT Aotearoa New Zealand won 12 seats, Aotearoa New Zealand First won 8 seats, the Indigenous Party won 4 seats, and the Green Party won 13 seats.

Aotearoa New Zealand's parliament usually comprises of 120 seats; however, this number can increase due to overhang seats. In the 2023 election, this was the case, and 123 seats were elected to Parliament. In order to form government, a party or coalition of parties needed least 62 of the 123 seats in Parliament. Given the National Party failed to do this by themselves, they were forced into a coalition with the ACT Party and NZ First, to attain a majority of seats in parliament. Luxon's national party in its triparted coalition with the conservative ACT Party and the populist Aotearoa New Zealand First party now retain 70 seats in parliament.

For the first time in Aotearoa New Zealand's history, the position of Deputy Prime Minister will be split into two 18-month terms, with alternating representatives from both Aotearoa New Zealand First and ACT parties. Aotearoa New Zealand First leader Winston Peters, 78, was sworn in alongside Luxon as deputy prime minister but will step down at the end of May 2025 to be replaced by ACT leader David Seymour for the second term. Peters will also serve as Foreign Minister throughout the three-year term of the coalition.

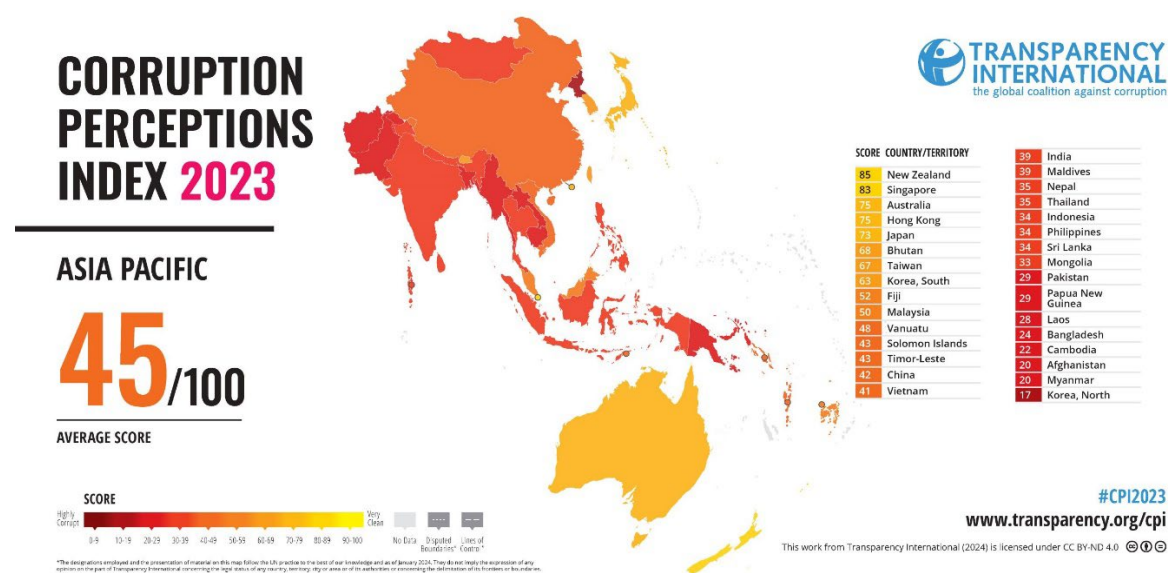
National Party leader and Prime Minister Christopher Luxon was sworn in on November 27, 2023. Luxon was first elected to parliament in 2020 after six consecutive years of the opposing Labour Party holding the position. Upon being elected, Luxon proclaimed that his first task is to revive the economy; “We have to reduce the cost of living and control inflation so that we can reduce interest rates and food prices.” Luxon stated that “The government will run a strong economy that will reduce the cost of living, provide tax breaks, restore law and order, deliver better public services and strengthen democracy.” He continued: “We have the team; we have the ideas, and we have a clear political programme for the next three years.”

Winston Peters, leader of Aotearoa New Zealand First, a small party which maintains the balance of power, said a new government “was desperately needed” in this country at this particular time, which has been plagued by corruption. Peters continued “there have been long, difficult, very complex, hard and tough conversations and we expected nothing less because that’s the nature of life itself and democracy in Aotearoa New Zealand.”

During its first 100 days in government, the National Party promised to crack down on crime, ban mobile phones in schools and abandon fuel duty increases. The new government also announced its intention to repeal some of the anti-smoking laws implemented by the previous centre left government. This policy decision has angered those in favour of a smoke-free society; however, the coalition plans to capitalise on this move to help fund tax cuts. Luxon stated that cigarette bans would have led to a thriving, untaxed black market.

5. Regional Political Context: Pacific Nations

5.1 Political Instability



The Pacific continues to be mired by political instability. Firstly, holding the highest score for corruption in the region (according to Transparency International’s 2023 Corruption Perceptions Index), Papua New Guinea experienced what sources have called their “worst election ever”. On August 9, 2023, 97 PNG Parliament members voted for the incumbent, James Marape, to remain Prime Minister, while none voted against him. His political rival and predecessor, Peter O’Neill, walked out of the chamber in abhorrence. This vote is

representative of a deeply flawed election. While Marape's Pangu Party secured only 36 of 118 seats, he also has the backing of 17 parties in his coalition and many independents, giving him near total control of the PNG parliament. Director of the Institute of National Affairs, a Port Moresby based think-tank, states that each election is worsening regarding the scale and extent of fraud. Papua New Guinea undertook a formal review in 2023 to improve future elections, however. This intends to enhance the country's ability to decrease corruption.



In February 2024, Marape was met with a motion of no confidence, which will be occurring in May 2024. Former Prime Minister Peter O'Neill has been active in highlighting concerns over corruption and threats to freedom of speech in the Marape government. Several MPs have also stood down from government following anti-Marape riots in Port Moresby that occurred in January 2024.

Furthermore, Vanuatu also continues to deal with political instability. Between September and December 2023, Vanuatu had three different prime ministers as politicians and parties fought for parliamentary authority. On November 7, 2023, Prime Minister Charlot Salwai faced a motion of no confidence following anticipated parliamentary debate on political integrity legislation, resulting in the withdrawal of all government sponsored bills. These prospective bills intended to progress previous governments' attempts at political integrity reform and were an essential step forward for Vanuatu's democracy. They intended to target MP's unrestricted ability to swap party affiliation at will and the formation of small, short term political parties without clear policy platforms. These practices are fuelling political instability and rent-seeking behaviour, however legislation which intended to curb such behaviour has been prevented from progressing.



Following the 2022 elections, Fiji's new government ended a nearly 16-year role of Frank Bainimarama. This period was characterised by the erosion of institutions, weak democratic norms and a disregard for the rule of law. While it is difficult to predict the trajectory of Fiji's new party on the democratic condition of the country, 2023 saw the repeal of repressive media laws and investigations into the conduct of previous elections and former leaders' alleged abuse of office.



5.2 Natural Disasters and Climate Change

The Pacific is ranked one of the most disaster-prone regions in the world, grappling with drought, tropical cyclones, earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, and health crises. Further, Pacific Island countries are extremely vulnerable to climate change, which is causing the loss of land and coastal infrastructure. It is the cause of intense tropical cyclones in the South Pacific, rising sea levels and ocean acidification. Additionally, Pacific communities are enduring more intense drought periods which inhibits crop production, damages coastal fisheries, destroys coral reefs and mangroves and renders communities more vulnerable to the spread of disease. PICs are also located in the hotspot of the Pacific Ring of Fire, meaning that 73% of the Pacific population and 65% of its economic base are exposed to seismic threats.

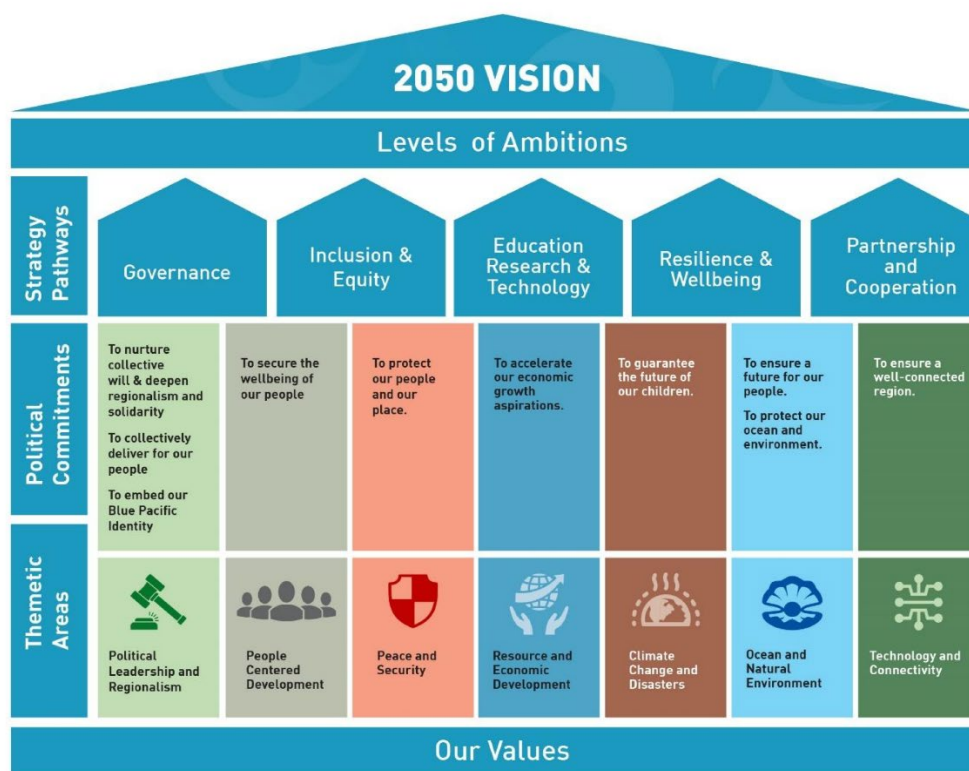
In 2022-2023, the Cook Islands, Kiribati, the Solomon Islands and Tuvalu have been on high alert for excessively dry conditions due to La Niña. Tuvalu also implemented their Disaster Response Emergency Fund for the first time anticipating a worsening drought. Additionally, Fiji and Vanuatu are on alert for excessively wet conditions. In fact, Fiji has experienced flooding in areas that were not previously prone to it. These impacts of climate change are also causing progressive long-term degradation of the natural environment such as coral reefs. This impacts social and economic systems of PIC communities given they depend on these ecosystems for subsistence and livelihoods. Consequently, poverty and health issues are rising due to poor diet and lack of food and income.

Amongst these threats, Pacific countries are increasingly exposed to environmental hazards which threaten the health of the population. This entails unsafe water, poor sanitation, air pollution, hazardous chemicals and occupational hazards. 70% of deaths in the Pacific are caused by noncommunicable diseases, including diabetes, cardiovascular, cancer and chronic

respiratory diseases. These are largely caused by psychological, environmental and behavioural factors, and the Pacific hosts one of the highest rates in the world.

Rising temperatures, rainfall pattern shifts and increasing frequencies of natural disasters also impact the livelihoods of Pacific Islands communities. Intense tropical cyclones have been far more common, notably in January 2023, successive Tropical Cyclones Judy and Kevin in Vanuatu swept through Vanuatu which resulted in the destruction of 19,152 households, affecting 185,000 people with disruptions to healthcare services. Over 26,000 children under 5 years were deprived of healthcare, immunisation and adequate nutrition. School children also could not access education until the schools were rebuilt. These tropical cyclones decreased Vanuatu’s GDP growth by 0.6% and demanded a recovery cost of US\$773 million. Additionally, Tropical Cyclone Lola struck Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands in October 2023, and flash floods hit Fiji and Samoa in March 2023. These natural disasters sadly exacerbate violence against women and other marginalised groups. Indeed, during cyclones Judy and Kevin, Vanuatu Women’s Crisis Centre recorded an increase of gender-based violence.

Many PICs have constructed their climate policy to help them adapt to the impacts of climate change. At the regional level, the Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific (2017-2030) guides the actions of PICs around localisation, risk finance, human mobility and risk governance. This framework bolsters climate resilience in the region. Further, the Pacific Islands Forum Strategy 2050 for the Blue Pacific Continent is approved by all PICs and advocates for regionalism as a strategic approach to foster a collective impact. Importantly as well, the Boe Declaration on regional security expands the concept of security to encapsulate environmental impacts, affirming that climate change remains the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of the Pacific people.



5.3 The Pacific Islands Forum

The Pacific Islands Forum aims to enhance cooperation among PICs and territories within Oceania over diplomatic, trade, security and climate related issues. The Forum hosted its 52nd Leaders' Meeting in the Cook Islands between 7-9 November 2023. In attendance were all its members: Australia, the Cook Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, French Polynesia, Kiribati, Nauru, New Caledonia, Niue, Palau, Samoa, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Aotearoa New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu.



The meeting outlined and reaffirmed commitments to relevant climate related issues. Firstly, the leaders endorsed the Pacific Regional Framework on Climate Mobility which “firmly acknowledges Forum Members’ fundamental priority to ‘stay in place’ in our ancestral homes, including through land reclamation, and is a global first that aims to provide practical guidance to governments planning for and managing climate mobility, while also respecting Members’

national laws and policies.” Members also affirmed that international law supports a presumption of continuity of statehood and does not consider its demise in the context of climate change related sea level rise.

Further, all Forum members were strongly encouraged to participate in the International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion on Climate Change proceedings. Leaders were also encouraged to join the High Level Ambition to End Plastic Pollution, and to support the ongoing plastics treaty negotiations.

The Forum also recognised the sovereignty of Members to determine their own national positions on the discharge by Japan of over 1 million tonnes of treated nuclear wastewater into the Pacific Ocean. Forum Leaders acknowledged the significant interest of deep-sea minerals among specific members and the sovereignty of PICs to determine their position on deep sea mineral development. Commitments by development partners to support all PICs in achieving primary submarine cable connectivity were also acknowledged.

Finally, leaders noted the update provided by Australia in relation to the AUKUS Security Pact and welcomed the transparency of Australia’s efforts and commitment to compliance with international law. In this context, leaders promoted full compliance by Members to the provisions of the Rarotonga Treaty concerning the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone and reiterated the invitation to remaining non-Party Forum Members to accede to the Treaty. They also urged the United States to ratify the Treaty Protocols.

5.4 The Pacific Islands Development Forum

The Pacific Islands Development Forum was established in 2013 and was heavily supported by Fiji. This Forum is separate from the PIF and does not include Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand or Papua New Guinea, as Fiji argued that they exerted undue dominance over PIF decisions.



The Forum has a strong focus on implementing policies for sustainable economic development in the Pacific, rather than trade and security concerns that the PIF deals with. It explicitly aims to advocate for the significance of climate change on the development of the Pacific and to harmonise the pursuit of economic growth with the needs of Pacific societies and the sustainability of the environment.

While the Forum has not hosted a summit nor released a publication since 2019, their primary initiative in 2023 was the “Solarisation of Residences of Pacific Heads of State Project”. This

seeks to ensure all residences of Pacific Islands country leaders are to be solar powered. The project partners with the UN-India Development Partnership Fund, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Office of South-South Cooperation, and Solar Head of State.

This is a component of a global campaign to validate the benefits of solar energy and begins with installing solar panels at the Fijian presidential residence to demonstrate the simplicity and immediate advantage of solar power.

At the Official Launch in February 2023, Fijian President Katonivere stated: “As a champion of sustainable development, I fully support the Solar Head of State initiative where PIDF demonstrates the all-of-society participatory approach to development as seen in its advocacy work in Renewable Energy, which will see the Solarisation of Head of States of Pacific Leader’s Residences where each system installed becomes a demonstration project to inspire the mass adoption of solar energy and other renewable energy technologies by the citizens of the country.”



Activities (Programs)

Activities of the Palestinian Embassy during the year 2023

Key activities responding to Israeli aggression on Gaza:

1. Organizing meetings of the Council of Arab Ambassadors (CAA) with DFAT

The Council of Arab Ambassadors held a meeting at the Palestinian Embassy headquarters, where the Palestinian Ambassador updated the Arab ambassadors on the latest developments concerning the Israeli aggression on Gaza Strip, particularly the official Palestinian position on this matter.



In this context, a delegation from the Council of Arab Ambassadors visited the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), where the delegation delivered a statement issued by the Ministerial Meeting of the League of Arab States regarding the Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip to the First Assistant Secretary of the Middle East and Africa Division at DFAT. The delegation presented the unified Arab position, strongly condemning the Israeli aggression on Gaza Strip and its disastrous consequences on the humanitarian situation for the residents of Gaza, considering this a blatant violation of international humanitarian law, and collective punishment.



2. Organizing meetings of the CAA with the Australian Foreign Minister

On 19 October 2023, in follow up to the 16 October meeting with DFAT, the Council of Arab Ambassadors (CAA) accredited to Australia met with the Australian Foreign Minister, Senator the Hon Penny Wong, to discuss the Israeli aggression on Gaza Strip, its repercussions, and the catastrophic humanitarian situation in Gaza. The meeting also touched on Australia's position in this regard, and the Arab Ambassadors called for Australia to adopt a balanced position towards this conflict and condemn the recurring Israeli crimes in the Gaza Strip.



The Palestinian Ambassador pointed out the importance and necessity of an immediate ceasefire as a prerequisite for facilitating the provision of emergency humanitarian aid to the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip, condemning Israel's criminal forced displacement of the population of the Gaza Strip. The Ambassadors discussed the dire and catastrophic situation in the Gaza Strip including Israel's total siege on Gaza, cutting off electricity, drinking water, fuel, and medical supplies, in addition to the brutal massacre at Al Ahli Hospital.

The Palestinian Ambassador also referred to the historical and political context and the root causes leading to the conflict, highlighting three main factors:

- i. The ongoing Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories for over 56 years, accompanied by widespread violations of Palestinian human rights, the establishment of an apartheid system, the continuation of the Zionist colonial project, the Judaization of Jerusalem, and the ongoing intrusions into Christian and Islamic holy sites.
- ii. The unjust Israeli blockade on the Gaza Strip for over 16 years, which has had detrimental impacts on the daily lives of the Palestinian people in Gaza Strip, as well as causing the deterioration of the economic and social conditions of these residents.
- iii. The failure to address the consequences of the Palestinian Nakba, especially finding a just solution to the Palestinian refugee problem on the basis of United Nations Resolution 194.

In this context, the Foreign Minister condemned the attack carried out by Hamas on October 7, asserting that Australia considers Hamas a terrorist organisation. She stated that Israel has a right to self-defence, and rejected the notion of an immediate ceasefire, stressing the need for Israeli hostages to be released first. The Palestinian Ambassador clarified that Israel does not, in fact, have a right to self-defence according to international law, as it is the occupying power.



The Foreign Minister also affirmed the importance and necessity of protecting Palestinian civilians and facilitating the entry of humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip, and reiterated Australia's position in support of a two-state solution. The Ambassadors pointed to the extent of civilian casualties in Gaza already, and Israel's plans to forcibly transfer Palestinians in blatant violation of international law.

The meeting also discussed in detail the impact of this war on the stance of the Islamic, Arab, and Palestinian communities in Australia. The Arab Ambassadors advised the Foreign Minister to effectively engage with these communities and their representatives, and listen carefully to their concerns.

3. Meetings of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation Heads of Mission (OIC-HOM) Group with the Australian Foreign Minister

On 6 December 2023, a delegation representing the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation Heads of Mission (OIC-HOM) Group in Canberra met with the Australian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Senator the Honourable Penny Wong, at Federal Parliament House. The delegation included the Chair of the Group, H.E. the Ambassador of the Republic of Indonesia, the incoming Chair, H.E. the Ambassador of Algeria, and H.E. the Ambassador of the State of Palestine.

The delegation delivered a statement from the OIC-HOM Group addressing significant issues related to the ongoing Israeli aggression on Gaza and the catastrophic humanitarian situation that the Palestinian people are being subjected to. In particular, the Palestinian Ambassador emphasised the important necessity that Australia adopts a more balanced position that is consistent with international law, and the delegation collectively called on Australia to support and promote an immediate, complete and permanent ceasefire as a prerequisite to the provision of sustained and unhindered humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people in Gaza.



In response, Australian Foreign Minister Wong stressed the importance of protecting Palestinian civilians in accordance with international humanitarian law, while stating that the Australian government had already conveyed its strongest language regarding a ceasefire.

(It should be noted that this position changed shortly thereafter with Australia's positive voting at the United Nations General Assembly on 12 December in favour of resolution A/ES-10/L.27 which demanded an “immediate humanitarian ceasefire”, and again with the 13 December joint-statement released by the Prime Ministers of Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand, and Canada, which stated support for “efforts towards a sustainable ceasefire”, conditional on Hamas surrendering and releasing all hostages.)

The Palestinian Ambassador also expressed appreciation to Australia for granting visitor visas for Palestinians in Gaza to come to safety in Australia, but underlined growing concerns that only a small number of individuals with approved Australian visas have actually been able to leave Gaza.

In response, the Foreign Minister stated that Australia is not in a position to assist all Australian visa holders to leave Gaza, and that Australian citizens, permanent residents, and their immediate family members will be prioritized.

4. OIC-HOM and CAA Joint Statements on Gaza

The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation Heads of Mission Group in Canberra (OIC-HOM) and the Council of Arab Ambassadors in Canberra (CAA) issued two identical statements regarding the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, focusing on the call for an immediate ceasefire, to facilitate the entry of humanitarian aid, and to prevent the forced displacement of the population of the Gaza Strip.

5. Seminar for Solidarity at the Australian National University

On 5 December 2023, the OIC-HOM Group, in cooperation with the Australian National University (ANU) Indonesian Student Association, organized an important political seminar at the ANU in Canberra, “Seminar for Solidarity with the Palestinian People”. The primary goal

of the event was to raise awareness and foster solidarity concerning the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

The Ambassador of the State of Palestine was the main speaker at the event, during which he delivered an important presentation on the historical and political context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the root-causes of the current situation, stretching back to the Palestinian Nakba from 1947, the Israeli military occupation of Palestine from 1967, and Israel's unjust and inhumane blockade on the Gaza Strip. The seminar was attended by members of the international and Arab diplomatic corps and a large number of ANU students.



6. Commemorating the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People

**INTERNATIONAL DAY OF
SOLIDARITY
WITH THE
PALESTINIAN PEOPLE**

6.1 On 15 November 2023, the General Delegation of Palestine, in partnership with the United Nations Information Centre, the Council of Arab Ambassadors, the Australian Parliamentary Friends of Palestine, and members of the OIC Heads of Mission Group in Canberra, organized an important event to commemorate the occasion of the United Nations' International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. This annual solidarity day falls on 29 November, but this event was organised on 15 November due to the presence of Ms. Francesca Albanese, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied

since 1967, in Australia on this date. This also meant that the event coincided with the 25th anniversary of the Palestinian Declaration of Independence.



Mr. Damien Onses, Director of the United Nations Information Centre in Canberra (UNIC), spoke first. He provided a historical background on the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, explaining that the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution in 1974 declaring the date of the partition of Palestine in 1947 as a day of solidarity with the Palestinian people. He also referred to statements by the UN Secretary-General about the situation in Gaza, particularly the importance of respecting international law and protecting civilians in times of war.



Ms. Albanese, the Special Rapporteur, was the key speaker at this event. She highlighted the position of international law regarding the Israeli aggression on Gaza Strip, clarifying that Israel does not have a right to self-defence as an occupying power. The Special Rapporteur explicitly stated that Israel's actions in Gaza constitute war crimes and collective punishment for which Israel must be held accountable. She described severe Israeli violations of human rights across all occupied Palestinian territories, not only in the context of the ongoing assault

against Gaza, and emphasized the importance of an immediate ceasefire and the delivery of urgent aid to the Palestinian people in Gaza.

Mr. Chris Sidoti, former Australian Human Rights Commissioner and current Member of the UN Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, also spoke at the event, emphasizing the important necessity of protecting children in Gaza Strip and enforcing international humanitarian law. He emphasised in particular that attacking and bombing hospitals constitutes a grave violation of international humanitarian law.

The Ambassador of the State of Palestine, H.E. Dr Izzat Abdulhadi, spoke next. In his speech, he discussed the current Israeli aggression's impact on Gaza Strip and the human and material cost of this aggression, urging the Australian government and the international community to support an immediate ceasefire and the regular and sustainable delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza. He explained the historical context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, outlining the root causes, especially the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians by Israel in 1948, the illegal occupation of Palestinian lands in 1967, and the unjust blockade on Gaza Strip for more than 16 years. He clarified that the current conflict is not religious but a political struggle against colonialism and racial discrimination, referring to the ongoing administrative detentions, extrajudicial killings, and settler attacks on unarmed Palestinians in the West Bank and Jerusalem. The Palestinian Ambassador stressed that any so-called 'day after' solution for the Gaza Strip that is not part of a comprehensive and durable solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the implementation of a two-state solution is unacceptable, as Gaza is an integral part of the occupied Palestinian territories and the state of Palestine.



The next speech was delivered by the Dean of the Council of Arab Ambassadors, Ambassador of the Lebanese Republic, H.E. Mr. Milad Raad. The Lebanese Ambassador condemned the Israeli aggression on Gaza Strip and called on the Australian government, on behalf of the Council of Arab Ambassadors, to support an immediate ceasefire and ensure the delivery of humanitarian aid to the Palestinians in Gaza Strip. He referred to the resolutions of the recent Arab-Islamic Summit held in Riyadh, stressing the importance of implementing its decisions, especially by supporting the two-state solution and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state within the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The President of the OIC Heads of Mission Group in Canberra, H.E. Dr Siswo Pramono, Ambassador of the Republic of Indonesia, spoke next. He noted the firm stance of Islamic countries against the continuation of Israel's aggression on Gaza and the necessity of a complete ceasefire to ensure the flow of humanitarian aid to the besieged Gaza Strip. He rejected Israel's forced evacuation and displacement of Palestinian residents from their homes and reaffirmed Indonesia's steadfast support for Palestinian national rights, especially the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to establish an independent, sovereign Palestinian state on their land with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The chairs of the Australian Parliamentary Friends of Palestine committee (Maria Vamvakinou MP representing the Australian Labor Party, Senator Janet Rice representing the Greens, and Hon Mark Coulton MP representing the Nationals) also delivered statements on the occasion expressing their support for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, the importance of delivering humanitarian aid, and condemning the killing of children and civilians as clear breaches of international humanitarian law and human rights law.

The event was attended by a large number of people, including members of parliament, representatives from the international and Arab diplomatic corps, human rights organizations and civil society, student and youth movements, and representatives of the Islamic, Arab, and Palestinian communities. The hosting of this event, with such significant attendance exceeding 150 people, demonstrated broad support for the Palestinian people, especially those in the Gaza Strip.



6.2 In the same context, the General Delegation of Palestine in Canberra organized a public event to commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People on December 10 2023, at the Islamic School in Canberra.

Members and representatives of Canberra's Muslim, Palestinian, and Arab communities alike participated in this occasion. Several speeches were delivered at this event, emphasizing solidarity with the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip and the importance of national unity in these difficult times experienced by the Palestinian people, both in the West Bank and Gaza

Strip. All speakers on the occasion focused on the catastrophic situation in Gaza and the absolute imperative of supporting an immediate and permanent ceasefire.



In his speech, the Palestinian Ambassador highlighted the most important elements of any advocacy campaign to support the Palestinian people in Gaza against ongoing Israeli violations and assaults. He stressed the importance of national unity within the framework of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), adhering to the rules of international law, and supporting an immediate, comprehensive and permanent ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. He also emphasized his rejection of Israel's forced displacement of the Palestinian people and the reoccupation or destruction of the Gaza Strip, denouncing the collective punishments and war crimes committed by the Israeli occupation authorities.



6.3 The General Delegation of Palestine, in partnership with the community organisation Falesteen Inc., organized a third important event to commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People at the United Workers Union in Brisbane, Queensland on 16 December 2023.

The Palestinian Ambassador delivered the keynote speech at the event, referring to the ongoing Israeli aggression and its catastrophic effects on the inhabitants of the Gaza Strip, and emphasising the vital necessity of an immediate and permanent ceasefire. He presented a

detailed explanation of the historical and political context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the root causes of the current onslaught.



The Ambassador also thanked the solidarity movements in Australia, New Zealand, and all countries worldwide for their support and solidarity with the Palestinian people and their legitimate rights, calling for these efforts to be sustained in the long-term.



Other speakers at this event included: Federal Parliament member Graham Perrett, former Senator and current head of the Human Rights Commission in Queensland Claire Moore, Head of the Queensland workers' unions Wendy Turner, Muhammad Khatree of Queensland Muslims Inc., and Omar Ashour of Falesteen Inc.

All speakers expressed broad solidarity with the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip, calling on the Australian government to support an immediate ceasefire.



7. Participation in Demonstrations

The Palestinian Ambassador and the staff of the Palestinian Embassy closely followed and participated in many of the solidarity demonstrations that took place in various states and territories across Australia and New Zealand in response to the Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip and the resulting humanitarian catastrophe. The Palestinian Ambassador spoke at many of these demonstrations, condemning the Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip and calling on the Australian government to support an immediate, comprehensive and permanent ceasefire, provide international protection for Palestinian civilians, and firmly, consistently implement the rules and principles of international law. Also, to recognise the State of Palestine without further delay.







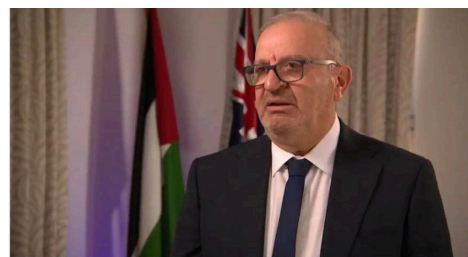
8. Media and Social Media

The General Delegation of Palestine effectively and efficiently used all of its social media channels to follow and report on the Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip, including Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), and the official website, accurately monitoring the ongoing developments daily.



The Palestinian Ambassador participated in a number of interviews with various visual, audio, and print media outlets, including ABC, SBS, Channel 7, Channel 9, Channel 10, NZ Radio, and major newspapers in Australia and New Zealand such as the Sydney Morning Herald, The Canberra Times, The Australian, The Guardian, and others. The questions from journalists and program hosts varied, but they mostly pertained to the Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip, the stance of the Australian and New Zealand governments, especially on the immediate ceasefire, humanitarian aid, forced displacement, the humanitarian situation, the right to self-defence, international law, the so-called “day after,” and other relevant and important issues.





Izzat Abdulhadi, speaking to Anna Henderson Source: SBS News

SBS Chief Political Correspondent Anna Henderson speaks to Izzat Abdulhadi, head of the General Delegation of Palestine to Australia and New Zealand, about the current conflict in the Middle East.

The General Delegation of Palestine translated all official statements issued by the Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates (MOFAE) and distributed them to members of parliament in Australia and New Zealand, members of the international and Arab diplomatic

corps, media outlets, civil society organizations, members of the Islamic, Arab, and Palestinian communities, and more.

The General Delegation also issued many statements of its own and sent identical letters to the Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers of Australia and New Zealand, while also actively following all official statements and declarations issued by the institutions of the State of Palestine, especially MOFAE, which effectively guided its actions and responses regarding the war on Gaza.

Furthermore, the General Delegation actively followed the discourse, discussions and statements related to the Israeli aggression on Gaza that took place within Parliament House and international community organizations.

9. Meetings with Community Representatives

In this same context, the Palestinian Ambassador held several meetings with representatives of the Islamic, Arab, and Palestinian communities at the Palestinian Embassy in Canberra. He also met with many representatives of civil society, political parties, workers' unions, religious institutions, and human rights organizations.



These meetings discussed the Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip and the role of these organizations in preparing and implementing clear advocacy programs for the benefit of the residents of the Gaza Strip, with a focus on an immediate ceasefire, sustained delivery of humanitarian aid, and preventing the forced displacement of the population in Gaza.

These meetings also discussed the important necessity of implementing the two-state solution, especially the establishment of an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital.

These meetings also discussed providing support to Australian-Palestinian families who have relatives in Gaza, the extreme difficulties faced by many families who had been granted Australian visitor visas (subclass 600) to join their families in Australia when attempting to exit Gaza and travel onward to Australia.



Bilateral and Multilateral Relations

1. On 16 January 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador and Counsellor Noura Saleh met with Mr. Marc Innes-Brown, the First Assistant Secretary (FAS) of the Middle East and Africa (MEA) Division at the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). The two parties discussed recent developments, especially the formation of the new Israeli government and its impacts and implications for the Palestinian cause, Australian aid to Palestine, Australia's voting pattern at the United Nations and the steps Australia has taken so far to support Palestinian rights.
2. On 26 January 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador participated in an event marking Australia's National Day, during which Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese awarded citizenship certificates to a large number of new Australian citizens of different nationalities and backgrounds in the presence of the Australian Governor-General, His Excellency General the Honourable David John Hurley AC DSC (Retd), and a large number of members of the international and Arab diplomatic corps.



3. In February 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador and his wife, Mrs Zeina Abdulhadi, made a diplomatic visit to New Zealand at the invitation of the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT). Along with a number of other members of the international diplomatic corps and their spouses, they travelled to the Bay of Islands to participate in Waitangi Day, considered the National Day of New Zealand, marking the anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi between Māori Chiefs and the British Crown in 1840.



This visit was an opportunity to learn more about the Treaty of Waitangi, the history of Māori (the indigenous people of New Zealand) and to gain a greater understanding of Māori perspectives, culture and lived experiences. Among the various activities organised in honour of Waitangi Day was a lunch hosted by HE the Rt Hon Dame Cindy Kiro, Governor General of Aotearoa New Zealand. Additionally, the Palestinian Ambassador had the opportunity to meet the newly appointed Prime Minister of New Zealand, Mr Chris Hipkins. The program also included visits to several industrial and agricultural areas with the aim of reviewing their programs in preparation for possible future engagement or cooperation with these participating countries.



4. On 8 February 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador, on behalf of President Mahmoud Abbas, honoured Ms. Golriz Ghahraman, a Member of the New Zealand Parliament representing the

Green Party, for her ongoing solidarity and support for the Palestinian people, particularly by introducing a resolution to the New Zealand Parliament calling for the recognition of the State of Palestine. The Palestinian Ambassador was accompanied by his wife, and a large number of other Members of Parliament and representatives of the Palestinian community in Auckland also attended the ceremony.



The Palestinian Ambassador delivered a speech on the occasion, in which he thanked Ms. Ghahraman MP for her moral courage and staunch support for Palestinian rights, especially the right of return for Palestinian refugees. He also thanked her for her continuous, committed support for human rights in general. Ms. Ghahraman MP thanked the Ambassador and President Abbas for this honour and reaffirmed her continuous support for the rights of the Palestinian people, in particular their right to self-determination and right to return.



5. On 14 February 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador spoke via phone with Mr. Jonathan Curr, the Divisional Manager of the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) Middle East and Africa Division. The two discussed the diplomatic status of the General Delegation of Palestine and a variety of other relevant issues, foremostly was the upcoming visit of the New Zealand Foreign Minister to Palestine.
6. On 22 March 2023, Counsellor Noura Saleh participated in a briefing at the invitation of the New Zealand High Commission in Canberra, on the occasion of the presence of Mr. Rob Taylor, MFAT's Deputy Secretary responsible for Europe, Middle East and Africa, and Australia Group. A large number of members of the international diplomatic corps accredited to New Zealand were also in attendance at the briefing, in which the Deputy Secretary discussed, among other issues, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. He clarified New Zealand's position in support of the two-state solution, considering Israel's settlement expansion to be the main obstacle to peace in this regard, and reaffirming the illegal nature of these settlements according to international law.



7. On 29 March 2023, Counsellor Noura Saleh participated in an Iftar organized by DFAT and attended by Australian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Senator the Hon Penny Wong, along with many Ambassadors of Islamic and Arab countries alike.
8. On 12 April 2023, at the invitation of the Australian Representative Office in Ramallah, the Palestinian Ambassador and his wife participated in an Iftar organized in honour of Palestinian graduates from Australian universities.

The Palestinian Ambassador delivered a speech on the occasion in which he thanked the Australian government for allocating 12 scholarships per year to Palestinian students to complete their postgraduate studies in Australia. He also thanked the esteemed graduates for their dedication to translating the knowledge and skills they acquired in Australian universities into innovative, pioneering programs and projects in the institutions they are working in.



9. On 14 April 2023, Counsellor Noura Saleh participated in an Iftar organized by the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation Heads of Mission (OIC-HOM) Group at the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in Canberra. Representatives from DFAT, Ambassadors of OIC-member countries, and other representatives of Islamic communities also participated in the iftar.



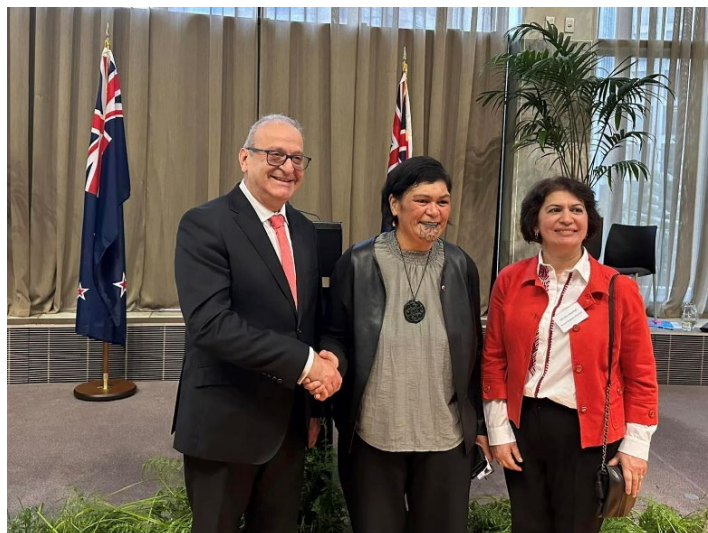
10. On 18 April 2023, Counsellor Noura Saleh participated in an Iftar organized by the OIC-HOM Group in Canberra. A large number of diplomats and representatives of Canberra's Islamic and Arab communities were also in attendance.



11. On 1 May 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador participated in a Reception on the occasion of Eid Al-Fitr, organized by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade at DFAT headquarters in Canberra. Australian Foreign Minister Wong delivered a speech on the occasion in which she praised the strong relations between Australia and the Islamic world. She also congratulated the Islamic world on the occasion of Eid al-Fitr, stressing that it is an opportunity to enhance harmony and cohesion amongst all countries and peoples of the world. The reception was attended by Ambassadors of Islamic and Arab countries.



12. On 3 May 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador, accompanied by his wife, made an official visit to New Zealand at the invitation of the Honourable Nanaia Mahuta, Minister of Foreign Affairs, to attend an afternoon reception and hear the Foreign Policy Address of Minister Mahuta. On the occasion, the Minister of Foreign Affairs delivered a comprehensive address that included the most important elements of New Zealand's foreign policy and international relations, with a focus on tensions in the Indo-Pacific region and the polarization between China and the United States in this context.



13. On 4 May 2023, in the context of his official visit to New Zealand, the Palestinian Ambassador met with Mr. Jonathan Curr, Divisional Manager of the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) Middle East and Africa Division, and other MEA Division staff.

In this meeting, the Palestinian Ambassador delivered a briefing of the latest developments in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, especially the escalating violence by Israeli settlers against Palestinian civilians, perpetrated with the support of the current Israeli government, and other Israeli violations of Palestinians' human rights which serve to strengthen and further entrench Israel's apartheid system. The Palestinian Ambassador also mentioned the upcoming commemoration of the Nakba at the United Nations General Assembly for the first time in history, and invited New Zealand to attend this historic event.



14. On 25 May 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador, accompanied by Counsellor Noura Saleh, met with Mr. Ridwaan Jadwat, the First Assistant Secretary of DFAT's Middle East and Africa Division. The discussion covered many issues, foremostly the latest Israeli violations of human rights, impacts and implications of the new Israeli government on the future of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Australian aid to Palestine, and Australia's possible recognition of Palestinian statehood.
15. On 1 June 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador met with Ms. Maria Vamvakinou MP, Chair of the Australian Parliamentary Friends of Palestine, at the Australian Federal Parliament House in Canberra. During this meeting, and during a subsequent working lunch at Federal Parliament House on 13 June 2023, the two parties discussed developments regarding the possible recognition of the State of Palestine by the Albanese government. They also discussed plans for the Parliamentary Friends of Palestine to advance this issue as an important priority.



16. On 21 June 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador and Embassy staff met with a delegation from the Aotearoa New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT), led by Mr. Jonathan Curr, Divisional Manager of the MFAT Middle East and Africa Division. The two parties discussed the details of the Aotearoa New Zealand Foreign Minister's upcoming visit

to Palestine in late August 2023¹, as well as the possibility of New Zealand recognizing the State of Palestine. The Palestinian Ambassador stressed the urgent importance of recognition, particularly given the presence of the most extremist right-wing Israeli government in the history of the State of Israel.



17. On 22 June 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador, accompanied by Counsellor Noura Saleh, participated in a consultative meeting organized by the Australian Parliamentary Friends of Palestine at the New South Wales (NSW) Parliament in Sydney, NSW. During this meeting, which was attended by more than 20 representatives, the Palestinian Ambassador delivered an important briefing on the latest developments of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, especially Israeli violations of human rights in Palestine, the ongoing expansion of Israel's illegal colonial settlement project, and the prospects for implementing a two-state solution that are diminishing as a direct result. The Palestinian Ambassador also discussed the importance of Australia's recognition of the State of Palestine, indicating the key legal, political, and moral justifications for taking this vital step.



¹ It should be noted that, unfortunately, Minister Mahuta's trip to the region was later deferred to an as yet unspecified future date.

18. The Palestinian Embassy followed up on the decisions announced by the Papua New Guinea and Fiji governments respectively to establish new embassies to Israel in Jerusalem. This serious and urgent matter was discussed in meetings of the Council of Arab Ambassadors and the OIC Heads of Mission Group respectively. Both groups decided to send identical letters to the Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea and the Prime Minister of the Republic of Fiji. The Palestinian Ambassador also sent identical letters to the leaders of these two countries, in which he strongly protested establishing any embassy in Jerusalem, as this is a step that directly contradicts principles of international law.



19. On 24 May 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador met with H.E. the Ambassador of the Republic of Timor-Leste to follow up on the implementation of development cooperation between the two countries, especially the program presented by the Palestinian International Cooperation Agency (PICA). The draft proposal included sending a Palestinian medical team to Timor-Leste within the framework of South-South cooperation. The two parties agreed to resume and finalise consultations after the formation of the new Timorese government.
20. On 15 August 2023, at the headquarters of the General Delegation of Palestine in Canberra, the Palestinian Ambassador and Embassy staff received a Senior Consultant contracted by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to evaluate the effectiveness, efficiency, and impact of Australia's aid program to Palestine. The Palestinian Ambassador answered all evaluation questions, presenting his perspective on the objectives and implementation strategies of Australian aid to Palestine, especially partnerships, continuity, and overall development impact.
21. From 17 to 19 August 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador participated in the 49th National Conference of the Australian Labor Party (ALP), held in the city of Brisbane, Queensland. The National Conference was attended by over 2,000 participants, and covered a variety of issues, the most important and relevant of which was the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and prospects for the ALP government's recognition of Palestinian statehood. In this context, the ALP National Conference adopted a resolution stating that it "Supports the recognition and right of Israel and Palestine to exist as two states within secure and recognised borders," calling on the Australian Government to recognise Palestine as a state, and that the National Conference expects that this issue will be an important priority for the Australian Government.

In the same context of the ALP National Conference, the Palestinian Ambassador attended a fringe event organized by the Australia Palestine Advocacy Network (APAN), a panel discussion entitled "Palestine: Reality, Recognition & Rights". The panel discussed the importance of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the necessity of

the current Australian government recognizing the Palestinian state. APAN also hosted a stall about Palestine on the sidelines of the conference.



22. On 4 October 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador met with Jonathan Curr, Divisional Manager of the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) Middle East and Africa Division, via Zoom technology. The two parties discussed the latest developments in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and Israeli violations of Palestinians' rights. They also discussed the development of bilateral relations between the State of Palestine and New Zealand, especially in the context of the upcoming visit of the New Zealand Foreign Minister to several countries in the region, including Palestine².
23. On 21 November 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador and Counsellor Noura Saleh, met with Members of the New South Wales Parliament in the city of Sydney. The Palestinian Ambassador briefed the MPs on the latest developments in the ongoing Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip, calling on the Australian government to adopt a balanced position in response and stressing the important necessity of supporting a permanent ceasefire. The Ambassador further called on the Australian government to adhere to principles of international law and condemn Israel's criminal policy of collective punishment and ongoing war crimes. It should be noted that this meeting took place at the invitation of the NSW Parliamentary Friends of Palestine.
24. On 30 November 2023, at the invitation of the Council of Arab Ambassadors, the Palestinian Ambassador attended a farewell dinner in honour of Mr Ridwaan Jadwat, the outgoing First Assistant Secretary of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)'s Middle East and Africa Division. The dinner was also an important opportunity for in-depth discussions about the ongoing Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip and the Australian government's position towards a complete and permanent ceasefire.



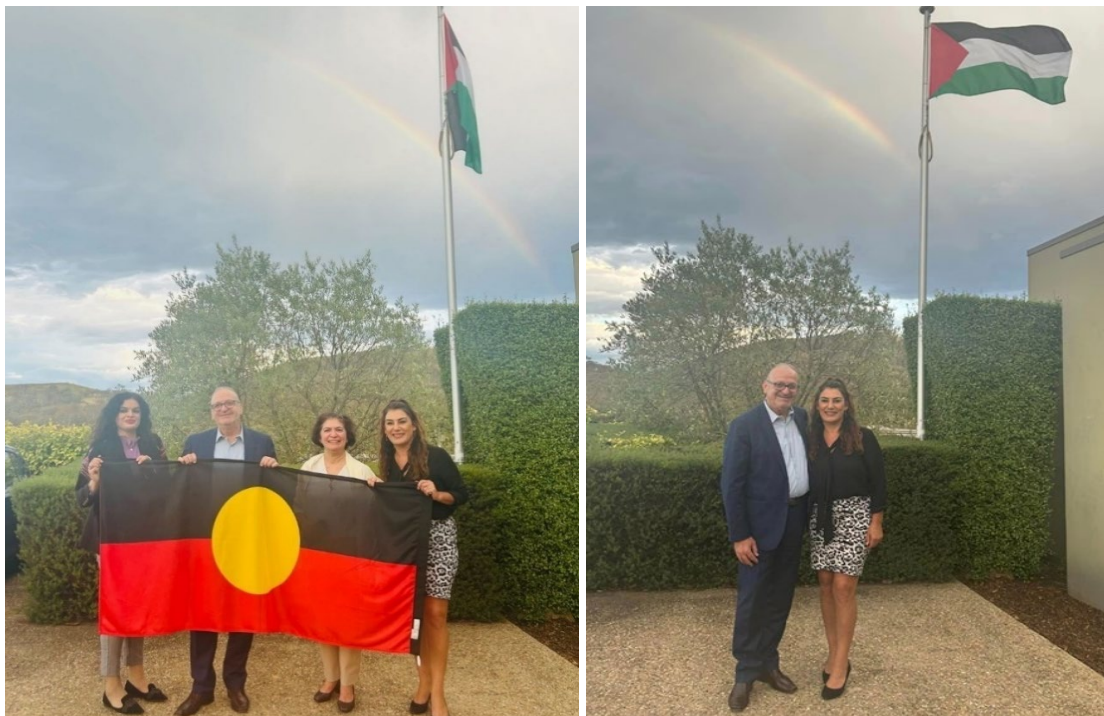
25. On 6 December 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador participated in a roundtable organized by Senator Lydia Thorpe on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, at Federal Parliament House in Canberra.

All speakers called on the signatory countries to this declaration to implement it without delay, referring to the rights of indigenous peoples in Australia in particular. The speakers also expressed their broad solidarity with the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip and condemned the massacres committed by the Israeli occupation, calling on the Australian government to support a comprehensive and permanent ceasefire.

² Unfortunately, Minister Mahuta's trip to the region was later deferred to an unspecified future date.



26. On 7 December 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador and Embassy Staff received Senator Lidia Thorpe at the Palestinian Embassy in Canberra, where the two parties discussed the collective struggle against colonialism and the many similarities shared between First Nations Australians and Palestinians, both being the indigenous peoples of their lands.



27. On 12 December 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador conducted a telephone call with Ms. Gemma Higgins, Assistant Secretary of DFAT's Middle East Branch, foremostly to enquire about the Australian government's new policy regarding the evacuation of some families from the Gaza Strip who have relatives in Australia and who had been granted Australian Visitor Visas (subclass 600). Australia's new policy, including the denial of consular assistance for the exit of these visa-holding families from Gaza, provoked very strong reactions within the Palestinian community in Australia and their supporters, who decried this measure and demanded that the Australian government fulfill its duty towards these families by facilitating their exit from the Gaza Strip.
28. On 13 December 2023, Counsellor Noura Saleh attended a briefing on Australia's newly-announced Cyber Security Strategy at the invitation of the Australian Department of Foreign

Affairs (DFAT). The briefing and the Q&A that followed was an opportunity to understand the broad outlines of this strategy, its objectives, and what is expected from it.



29. On 20 December 2023, the Ambassador of the State of Palestine had a discussion with Mr. Jonathan Curr, Divisional Manager of the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) Middle East and Africa Division, via phone call. The discussion focused on the latest developments in Israel's escalating aggression against the Gaza Strip.

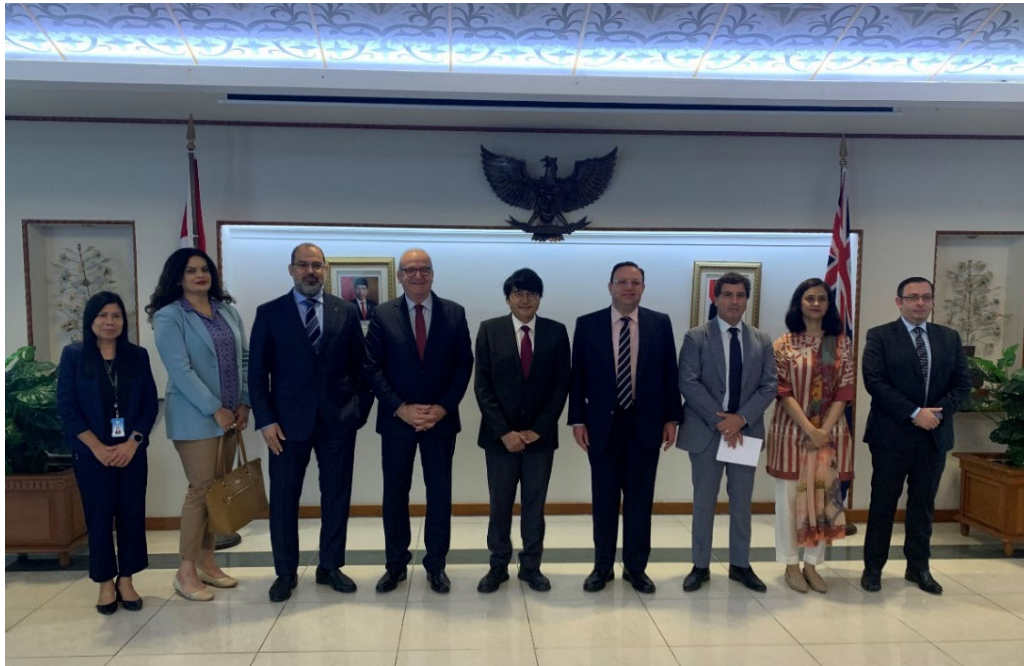
The Palestinian Ambassador explained the position of the Palestinian government in this regard, calling on the New Zealand government to call for a comprehensive ceasefire and facilitate the entry of humanitarian aid to the residents of the Gaza Strip. The two parties also discussed many other issues of mutual interest.

International and Arab Diplomatic Corps

1. On 12 January 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador participated in a meeting of the Steering Committee of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Heads of Mission Group in Canberra. The Group discussed a range of topics, including the repeated Israeli attacks on the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the ongoing violations of Palestinian human rights.

The group took a series of actions, including requesting an urgent meeting with the Australian Foreign Minister to update her on the latest developments in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and calling on Australia to recognize the State of Palestine.

The group also discussed plans for organising a Ramadan Iftar, and discussed the professional standards required for the group's presidency after the current president (the Ambassador of the Republic of Indonesia) requested to step down to give other members the opportunity to assume this position. It was agreed that the presidency of the group would rotate alphabetically among the countries, with Indonesia continuing to provide logistical support to the group.



2. On 18 February 2023, the Palestinian Embassy participated in the National Multicultural Festival in Canberra. The Palestinian pavilion presented information about Palestine, tourism, traditional embroidery, handicrafts, fine art, and cuisine, and displayed an exhibition of embroidery and handicraft items, as well as an exhibition of photographs from Palestine.

A large number of festival-goers visited the Embassy's stall and the adjacent stall hosted by Palestine Fair Trade Australia. Visitors expressed their appreciation and admiration of Palestine's rich cultural heritage.





3. On 2 March 2023 and again on 30 May, the Palestinian Ambassador participated in meetings of the Council of Arab Ambassadors in Canberra. Discussions focused on Israeli attacks against Al-Aqsa Mosque, plans by the governments of Papua New Guinea and Fiji respectively to open embassies in Jerusalem in violation of international law, and the status of Australian-Arab relations amid regional tensions in the Indo-Pacific.



4. On 9 March 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador attended a business brunch at the Swiss Embassy in Canberra to honour Mr. Robert Mardini, the Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), on the 160th anniversary of the ICRC. Mr. Mardini discussed the role of the Red Cross in Palestine and responded to participants' questions.



5. On 5 May 2023, Counsellor Noura Saleh participated in a dinner party organized by Latin American countries in Canberra to celebrate Spanish Language Day. The event featured artistic performances that reflected the culture and heritage of the participating countries.



6. On 9 May 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador attended a reception hosted by the European Union delegation in Canberra for Europe Day. The event and speeches on the occasion were marked by broad condemnation of Russia and reaffirmations of support for the Ukrainian government.



7. On 9 May 2023, at the invitation of the Lebanese Ambassador to Australia, the Palestinian Ambassador attended a luncheon in honour of Mr. George Okais, a visiting member of the Lebanese Parliament. The event was well attended by Arab Ambassadors accredited to Australia and members of the Lebanese community, and was an opportunity for in-depth discussion of the situation in Lebanon and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.
8. On 24 May 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador and Counsellor Noura Saleh met with the Ambassador of the Republic of Timor-Leste. They discussed bilateral relations between the two countries, developments in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and development cooperation

between Timor-Leste and Palestine, including a proposal to send a Palestinian medical delegation to Timor-Leste.



9. On 25 May 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador, accompanied by his wife and Counsellor Noura Saleh, participated in the Africa Day celebrations in Canberra, which featured performances and foods presented by different African Union countries and was attended by the Governor-General of Australia and numerous dignitaries.



10. On 15 June 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador met with the Turkish Ambassador at the Turkish Embassy in Canberra. They discussed enhancing efforts to gain recognition of the Palestinian state by the current Australian government.



11. On 16 June 2023, at the invitation of the Venezuelan Ambassador, the Palestinian Ambassador met with a delegation from the Australian Communist Party. The meeting covered the current political situation in Australia, focusing on the rights of indigenous peoples. The delegation also seized the opportunity to express their support and solidarity with the Palestinian cause.



12. On 31 July 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador and his wife attended a gathering to celebrate the occasion of International Friendship Day at Federal Parliament House in Canberra. The reception was a joint event organised by the Embassy of Paraguay in Australia and the Government Whip in the House of Representatives. This event emphasized global friendship through multiculturalism and cuisine, and also served as a farewell for the Dean of the International Diplomatic Corps, H.E. Dr. Ali Kraishan the Ambassador of Jordan.



13. On 23 August 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador and Counsellor Noura Saleh attended a Panel Discussion titled “Latin American perspectives on the Asia-Pacific”, organized by the Australian Institute of Foreign Affairs (AIIA). The Panel speakers, the Ambassador of Ecuador, the Ambassador of Chile, and Minister Plenipotentiary of Colombia, discussed relations with China, India, Australia, ASEAN countries, and other relevant issues.

14. On 10 October 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador held consultations with the Dean of the Council of Arab Ambassadors (the Ambassador of the Republic of Lebanon) and the current Chair of the Council (the Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia). The aim of this was to thoroughly prepare for the upcoming convening of the Council of Arab Ambassadors, which would discuss the Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip and develop a plan to strengthen solidarity with the Palestinian people. This council meeting took place on 27 November 2023 under the chairmanship of the Saudi Ambassador, and all Arab Ambassadors participated. [Detailed description of this activity can be found in **2023 Activities: Key Activities Responding to Israeli Aggression on Gaza**]
15. On 24 October 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador participated in a meeting of the Steering Committee of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Heads of Mission Group in Canberra to discuss the Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip and strategies to support a comprehensive and permanent ceasefire, and to ensure the sustained delivery of sufficient humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip. [Detailed description of this activity can be found in **2023 Activities: Key Activities Responding to Israeli Aggression on Gaza**]
16. On 25 October 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador and Embassy Staff attended the Australian National Internships Program (ANIP) 30th Anniversary Showcase at Parliament House, at the invitation of Associate Professor Laurence Brown, the Director of ANIP. This event was attended by current ANIP interns and alumni of the program, as well as internship hosts, including the General Delegation of Palestine and other diplomatic missions, Parliamentary offices, Commonwealth Government Departments, NGO's, think tanks, and so on.
17. On 15 November 2023, the General Delegation of Palestine, in partnership with the United Nations Information Centre, the Council of Arab Ambassadors and the Parliamentary Friends of Palestine, hosted an event observing the UN International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People at the Australian Federal Parliament in Canberra. All speeches focused on the brutal ongoing Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip, and every speaker called for an urgent humanitarian ceasefire. [Detailed description of this activity can be found in **2023 Activities: Key Activities Responding to Israeli Aggression on Gaza**]

The main speaker at this event was Francesca Albanese, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, in addition to Chris Sidoti, former Australian Human Rights Commissioner and current Member of the UN Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Other speakers included the Ambassador of the State of Palestine, the Director of the United Nations Information Center (UNIC), the Ambassador of Lebanon and Dean of the Council of the Arab Ambassadors, the Ambassador of Indonesia and President of the OIC-HOM Group in Canberra, and the co-chairs of the Australian Parliamentary Friends of Palestine.
18. The Palestinian Ambassador had meetings throughout 2023 with other Ambassadors accredited to Australia, including those representing Algeria, Cyprus, Kuwait, Lebanon, Malta, Morocco, and Turkey.



19. The Palestinian Ambassador also participated in a number of farewell activities for departing Ambassadors, primarily organised and hosted by the Dean of the International Diplomatic Corps, throughout 2023.





20. Throughout the year, the Palestinian Ambassador, his wife Mrs Zeina Abdulhadi, and Counsellor Noura Saleh participated in a number of national day events hosted by members of the international diplomatic corps in Canberra. These events are important opportunities for networking and for discussion of the latest developments in the Palestinian cause.

National Day celebrations attended in 2023 included those of Australia, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, China, Chile, Colombia, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Egypt, the European Union, France, Georgia, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Iran, Ireland, Italy, Korea, Kuwait, Mexico, Nepal, Norway, Peru, Philippines, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Africa, Thailand, the United Arab Emirates, Turkey, and Vietnam.





21. The Palestinian Ambassador, Counsellor Noura Saleh, and Embassy Staff participated in a number of cultural festivals, film screenings, exhibitions, and other such events throughout

the year that were hosted by diplomatic missions accredited to Australia, representing Belgium, Finland, Nepal, Portugal, Uruguay, Venezuela, and others.

22. Additionally, the wife of the Palestinian Ambassador, Mrs Zeina Abdulhadi, and Embassy Staff participated in a number of activities related to and organised by the Association of Spouses of Heads of Diplomatic Missions in Canberra (ASHOM).



Public Diplomacy

1. On 23 January 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador participated in commemorating the launch of the Palestinian revolution on January 23, 2023, in Sydney. The event was organized by the Fatah movement in Australia. During the event, the Palestinian Ambassador delivered a speech in which he highlighted the sacrifices of the Palestinian people to achieve the right to self-determination, establish an independent state with East Jerusalem as its capital, and the right of return. He also mentioned the current Australian position under the leadership of the Labor Party, urging the Labor government to recognize the State of Palestine without further delay.



2. On 27 January 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador held an important consultation session with several leaders of the Palestinian community in Sydney. The Ambassador presented a briefing on the latest developments in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the detrimental effects of the new Israeli government on prospects for implementing the two-state solution. He also discussed current pathways and strategies for Palestinian leadership to achieve the right to self-determination for the Palestinian people in statehood, as well as the key ongoing Palestinian, Arab, and international efforts to provide protection for the Palestinian people and expose Israel's grave violations of human rights and international law. The attendees discussed a unified strategy to lobby the Australian government to recognize the State of Palestine as an important priority.
3. On 27 January 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador participated in the official opening ceremony of Punchbowl Mosque in NSW, at the invitation of Human Appeal Australia (HAA). This distinguished mosque was established with support from HAA and partial funding from the State of Kuwait. The opening ceremony was attended by Australian Members of Parliament, Ministers, and other officials, members of the clergy, the Governor of NSW, members of the International Diplomatic Corps, and representatives of the Muslim community.



4. On 5 March 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador, accompanied by Counsellor Noura Saleh, participated in a graduation ceremony for outstanding students. The ceremony was organized by the Human Appeal Foundation in Sydney, and the Palestinian Ambassador was honoured to speak on the occasion and present certificates to the distinguished graduates.



5. On 25 February 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador and Counsellor Noura Saleh participated in a fundraising dinner organized by the Palestinian Australian New Zealand Medical Association (PANZMA) in Sydney. The evening featured a comedy show by special guest, Palestinian comedian Amer Zahr. The Palestinian Ambassador delivered a speech on the occasion, explaining the continuous Israeli violations against healthcare in Palestine and the obstacles and challenges faced by the healthcare sector under Israeli occupation. Dr. Alaa Mustafa, the General Director of PANZMA, also spoke about the goals and programs of the association. The event was attended by many members of parliament, representatives of civil society, and members of the Islamic, Arab, and Palestinian communities.



6. On 27 February 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador, accompanied by his wife and Counsellor Noura Saleh, participated in the book launch ceremony of the Palestinian novelist in the diaspora, Dr. Najma Habib, in Sydney. The Palestinian Ambassador delivered a speech on the occasion in which he thanked Dr. Habib for her literary and intellectual contributions and presented her with a plaque and a certificate of appreciation. Many cultural and literary figures from the Arab and Palestinian communities in Sydney attended the event.





7. On 8 March 2023, a delegation from the International Relations Society of the Australian National University (ANU) visited the Palestinian Embassy in Canberra. The student delegation consisted of over 12 students pursuing various academic fields, especially political science, international relations, and diplomacy. The Palestinian Ambassador delivered a presentation to the students about key milestones in Palestinian history, linking the historical perspective and narrative of the Palestinian story with the latest developments in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The students actively participated in the dialogue and inquired about many important issues regarding Palestinian rights and the Palestinian strategy to achieve the right to self-determination and statehood. The resulting lively discussion was bold and thoughtful, reflecting the growing understanding of the Palestinian cause among young university students in Australia.



8. On 11 March 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador participated in a fundraiser organized by the Gaza Children's Fund Inc. for the benefit of children in the Gaza Strip. The Palestinian Ambassador delivered a speech on the occasion in which he highlighted the suffering of the people of Gaza under the unjust Israeli blockade and called on the international community to pressure Israel to lift this blockade. He also encouraged attendees to generously donate to

this important institution and participated in distributing certificates of appreciation to outstanding students. The Al Jazeera documentary “60 Minute Warning” was screened at this event, detailing the daily challenges of life in Gaza due to repeated Israeli attacks and highlighting the importance of responding to the humanitarian needs of the people in Gaza.



9. On 11 March 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador participated in an event organized by the Syrian Social National Party (SSNP) to celebrate the birthday of the party's founder, Antoun Saadeh. The Ambassador delivered a speech on the occasion praising Saadeh's achievements and his significant role in supporting the national rights of the Palestinian people.



10. On 14 March 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador participated in a celebration of the launch of the Australian Jordanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (AJCCI) in Sydney. The event was attended by many Jordanian and Palestinian businessmen, where Professor Charlie (Khalil) Shahin AO, Chairman of the Chamber, presented the goals of the Chamber and prospects for trade and investment between Australia and Jordan.
11. On 12 May 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador, his wife, and Counsellor Noura Saleh participated in a memorial of prominent journalist and beloved national hero, the martyr Shireen Abu Akleh, one year after her assassination. The one-year memorial was hosted by Palestinians Christians in Australia (PCIA) in the city of Sydney.

The Palestinian Ambassador delivered a speech on the occasion, in which he praised Shireen's virtues, her professional experience, and her extensive coverage of the realities faced by Palestinians. He also pointed out Israel's clear responsibility for the assassination of Shireen Abu Akleh, noting that Shireen was one of over 150 Palestinians killed by Israeli forces in the occupied West Bank in 2022. He demanded justice for Shireen, and called on the International Criminal Court to immediately begin an investigation into her murder and prosecute those responsible.

The President of PCIA, Susan Wahhab, also spoke at the event and demanded justice for Shireen Abu Akleh. Other speakers included the Honourable Lynda Voltz MP, Antony Loewenstein, journalist and co-founder of Independent Australian Jewish Voices, and Rawan Arraf, the Principal Lawyer & Director at the Australian Centre for International Justice. The event was attended by several New South Wales parliament members and representatives of the Arab and Palestinian communities.





12. On 13 May 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador and Embassy staff participated in a mass rally organized on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the Palestinian Nakba in the city of Sydney.

The large demonstration saw participation from many members of parliament, representatives of solidarity movements with the Palestinian people, academics, intellectuals, and representatives of civil society in Australia. Representatives of First Nations (indigenous) communities and organisations also participated in large numbers.

Several speeches were delivered, reaffirming the Palestinian narrative and condemning 75 years of continuing the Nakba through Israel's establishment of an apartheid regime, colonial occupation, and illegal settlement expansion project. The speeches emphasized that the Palestinian national struggle will continue until the Palestinian people achieve their goals of freedom and independence.





13. On 3 June 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador, accompanied by his wife and Counsellor Noura Saleh, participated in commemorating the 75th anniversary of the Palestinian Nakba at an event in Sydney at the invitation of Mr. Bashir Sawalha, President of the General Union of Palestinian Workers in Sydney and the Palestinian Graduates Association. The Palestinian Ambassador delivered a speech addressing the political and humanitarian impacts of the Palestinian Nakba on the Palestinian people, affirming that the Nakba continues to this day through the ongoing Israeli colonial settlement project and Israel's severe violations of human rights. The Ambassador also highlighted the international community's responsibility for this catastrophe and its role in correcting this historical injustice by immediately recognizing the right of return and supporting the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital. Several Australian politicians, including former Foreign Minister the Hon Bob Carr, spoke at this event, highlighting Australia's moral responsibility for the Palestinian Nakba and calling for immediate recognition of the Palestinian state. The event concluded with a speech by a representative and leader of the Palestinian community, Mr. Eddie Zananiri, who discussed the Labor Party's platform, urging the Australian Labor Government to recognize the State of Palestine.

14. On 15 May 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador participated in an event to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Palestinian Nakba, hosted by the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU) Victoria. The importance and significance of Australia recognising the State of Palestine was an important recurring theme at this event, which was organised as part of an International Solidarity Initiative by AMWU Victoria that seeks to commemorate, educate, and acknowledge the sacrifices of international progressive movements around the world.

The Ambassador participated in a panel discussion chaired by Maria Vamvakinou MP, co-chair of the Australian Parliamentary Friends of Palestine, alongside Nasser Mashni, President of the Australia Palestine Advocacy Network (APAN), Noura Mansour, Community Organising and Advocacy Lead at APAN, and Tony Piccolo, Assistant State Secretary of AMWU Victoria. The Palestinian Ambassador also delivered a comprehensive speech on the occasion, discussing the impacts and consequences of the Palestinian Nakba on the Palestinian people and emphasizing that the Nakba continues to this day.



15. On 19 May 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador and his wife participated in the inaugural Gala Dinner hosted by Oz Arab Media in Sydney. This media institution is dedicated to supporting the Arab diaspora in Australia and enhancing the relationship and understandings between the Arab world and Australia by publishing news, articles and information relevant to both.



16. On 21 May 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador and his wife Zeina Abdulhadi met with the former Foreign Minister of Australia, the Honourable Bob Carr, and his wife Helena Carr, for a business lunch in Canberra. The discussion covered various topics, including the latest developments in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the issue of Australia recognizing the Palestinian state.



17. On 26 May 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador met at the headquarters of the Palestinian Embassy with Professor Richard Madden BSc PhD FIAA and Dr Ros Maddon AM MSc PhD, who presented the Palestinian Ambassador with a set of guidebooks about Palestine dating back to the year 1850. The Palestinian Ambassador thanked Professor and Dr Maddon sincerely for donating these valuable books, which will significantly enrich the Palestinian historical library.



18. On 8 June 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador met with Dr. Anas Iqtait, lecturer at the Australian National University, within the framework of the Ambassador's ongoing consultations with members of the Palestinian community in Canberra. The two discussed the best ways to enhance the Palestinian community's voice in the Australian Parliament to defend Palestinian national rights, and the possibility of forming a representative body for the Palestinian community to have a tangible impact on Australian foreign policy in this regard.
19. On 13 June 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador and Embassy Staff attended an address by Professor Gareth Evans on the case for recognising Palestine, delivered at Parliament House in Canberra. This event was organised by the Parliamentary Friends of Palestine and sponsored by the Australia Palestine Advocacy Network (APAN). In his speech, Professor Gareth Evans, former Foreign Minister of Australia, reaffirmed the importance and significance of Australia recognising the State of Palestine immediately, without delay, presenting key legal, political, and moral arguments.



20. On 19 June 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador met with Solicitor Sim Moore at the Palestinian Embassy in Canberra. The two discussed the request submitted by the State of Palestine and UNGA to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for advisory opinion from the Court on Israeli practices affecting the human rights of the Palestinian people in the Occupied

Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. The request included questions about the legal consequences arising from the ongoing violation by Israel of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, from its prolonged occupation, settlement and annexation of the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including measures aimed at altering the demographic composition, character and status of the Holy City of Jerusalem, and from its adoption of related discriminatory legislation and measures.

21. On 21 June 2023, at the invitation of the Anglican School Googong, the Palestinian Ambassador delivered a lecture about Palestine to high-school Modern History students. The Ambassador emphasized the importance of the Palestinian narrative, outlining key events in Palestinian history and linking this historical framework to key recent developments in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.



22. The Palestinian Ambassador participated in several virtual meetings with the Mayor of Ramallah and representatives of the Justice for Palestine advocacy group based in New Zealand. He also participated in another meeting with Councillor Nīkau Wi Neera of the Wellington City Council during an official visit to New Zealand. These meetings revolved around the twin-city proposal to connect the Municipality of Ramallah and the Municipality of Wellington. Everyone expressed their desire to implement this important project, awaiting the final decision and vote from the Wellington municipality.



23. On 5 July 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador participated in a dinner event at the invitation of the Arab Australian Federation (AAF) in Sydney. This event was intended to honour Tony Maron and posthumously pay tribute to the late Peter Indari and John Bechara, three Maronite Christian figures who were lifelong advocates for Arab causes, especially the Palestinian struggle. The Palestinian Ambassador delivered the keynote speech at the occasion, thanking the honorees for their long-standing and steadfast advocacy for the Palestinian people and their national rights. Mr. Eddie Zananiri, AAF President, also delivered an important speech praising the honorees and reflecting on his personal experiences with each of them over the years. Mr. Tony Maron, one of the honorees, spoke on the occasion. He thanked the organizers and reviewed the history of his and his fellow honorees' advocacy work and their role in enhancing solidarity with the Palestinian people.



24. On 8 July 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador participated in a massive demonstration in Sydney in support and solidarity with the residents of Jenin refugee camp following the Israeli aggression on the camp which resulted in many casualties and injuries. Many speeches were

delivered in the context of the demonstration, condemning the Israeli aggression and reaffirming support for the Palestinian people and their rights.



25. On 9 July 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador was invited by the Syrian Social National Party (SSNP) to attend an event on the occasion of the anniversary of the martyrdom of the party's founder, Antoun Saadeh. This event was attended by many supporters of the party and members of the Arab and Palestinian communities in Sydney.

The Palestinian Ambassador gave a speech on the occasion, in which he touched on the long history of struggle of the deceased and his continuous support for the Palestinian cause, citing some of his articles. The Palestinian Ambassador also referred to the Israeli aggression on Jenin Camp and the heroic resistance shown by the camp's residents in confronting this criminal aggression.

26. On 24 July 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador held several meetings with representatives of the Palestinian and Arab communities in Sydney, especially the Arab Australian Federation (AAF) and the General Union of Palestinian Workers. These meetings were an opportunity to discuss an advocacy plan and strategies to strengthen solidarity with the Palestinian people in Australia.
27. On 29 July 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador, accompanied by Mr. Eddie Zananiri, President of the Arab Australian Federation (AAF), had a meeting with former Australian Foreign Minister, the Honourable Bob Carr. The meeting was an opportunity for analysis and discussion of the current situation in Palestine, to understand the Palestinian perspective on developments in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and the efforts of Arab communities in Australia to advocate for the Palestinian people.
28. In late July, during his visit to Brisbane to participate in the Australian Labor Party National Conference, the Palestinian Ambassador met with representatives of the Palestinian community in the State of Queensland. This was an opportunity to discuss several issues, including the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, activities and efforts of the Embassy to promote recognition of the State of Palestine, and many consular matters of interest to the Palestinian community.



29. On 23 August, at the invitation of Women’s International Club (WIC), the wife of the Ambassador of the State of Palestine, Mrs Zeina Abdulhadi, and the Staff of the Palestinian Embassy participated in organising an “Arab Heritage Day” in Canberra. Mrs Abdulhadi delivered the keynote speech at the event, alongside the President of WIC, Dr Mayada Kayali. In her speech, Mrs Abdulhadi discussed the important significance of culture, heritage, and identity, with a focus on the deep, rich cultures of Arab countries, including Palestine.



As part of this event, the Palestinian Embassy presented a stall displaying many components of Palestinian cultural heritage, especially embroideries and handicrafts, and photographs depicting various components of Palestinian cultural and daily life. Women from the various Arab communities, including the Palestinian community, also presented a fashion show to showcase the traditional cultural dress of each participating Arab country.





30. On 2 October 2023, the wife of the Palestinian Ambassador, Mrs Zeina Abdulhadi, and Counsellor Noura Saleh participated in the seventh annual Al Awdah International Film Festival in Sydney. The event included the screening of a number of films produced in the Gaza Strip, under the theme of “Awaiting the Right of Return”. Counsellor Noura Saleh also presented certificates of appreciation to a number of Palestinian directors and filmmakers in Australia on the occasion.





31. In response to the Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip, the Palestinian Ambassador conducted many television, radio, and press interviews. In this same context, the Palestinian Ambassador and the Embassy staff participated in many actions and marches around Australia in solidarity with the Palestinian people, especially in Gaza. The Palestinian Ambassador also conducted numerous meetings with representatives of the Islamic, Arab, and Palestinian communities, as well as with representatives of the Australian civil society. These meetings focused on the current events in Gaza and developing a clear advocacy plan. [Detailed descriptions of these, and other related activities can be found in **2023 Activities: Key Activities Responding to Israeli Aggression on Gaza**]





32. On 3 November 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador participated in a fundraising dinner organized by Human Appeal Australia (HAA) in Canberra for the people of Gaza and Afghanistan. This event was an evening of compassion, solidarity, and collective action, attended by a large number of members of the Islamic, Arab, and Palestinian communities.



33. On 7 November 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador and Counsellor Noura Saleh attended the memorial service for Mr. Kevin Bray, one of the foremost defenders of Palestinian rights in

Canberra. The Ambassador and Counsellor offered sincere condolences to the widow of the deceased and thanked her for her continuous support for the rights of the Palestinian people.



34. On 12 November 2023, at the invitation of Palestinian Christians in Australia (PCIA), the Palestinian Ambassador, his wife, and Counsellor Noura Saleh participated in a fundraising dinner in Sydney. The proceeds from this dinner were allocated to support displaced families in Gaza and students in Palestine.

The main guest speaker at the event was Francesca Albanese, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967. In her speech, the Special Rapporteur clarified Israel's war crimes and violations of international law in Gaza, details of the unfolding humanitarian catastrophe, and highlighting Israel's forcible displacement of the Palestinian people as collective punishment.

PCIA President Susan Wahhab thanked the attendees, and delivered a moving speech on the occasion, expressing solidarity with our Palestinian people in Gaza and urging the Australian government to call for a ceasefire without further delay.





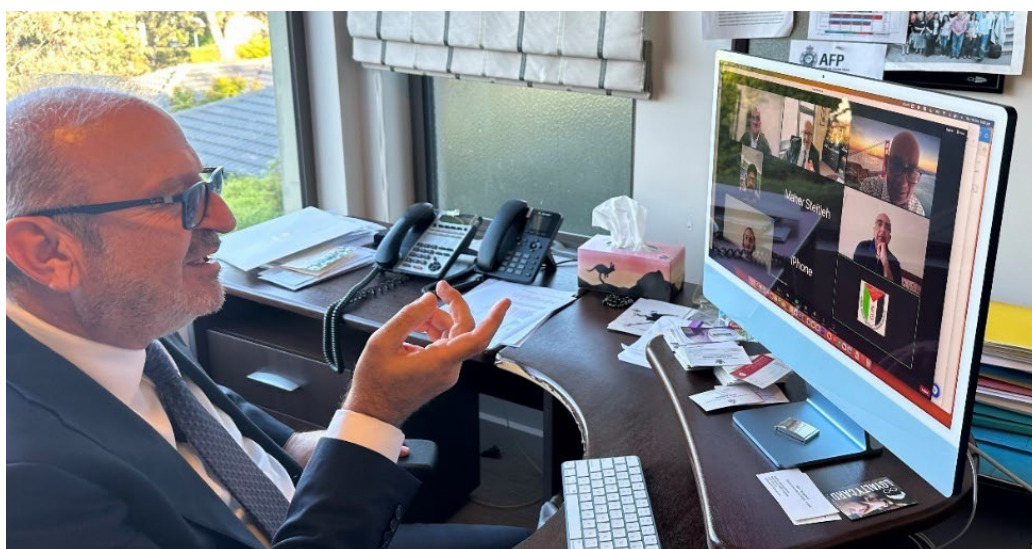
35. On 23 November 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador and Counsellor Noura Saleh participated in a candlelight vigil mourning the victims of the Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip. The vigil took place in Sydney, and the Palestinian Ambassador delivered a speech on the occasion, highlighting the extent of suffering in the Gaza Strip, urging the Australian government to call for a permanent ceasefire. He also clarified the position of the Palestinian government towards the so-called ‘day after’, explaining that Gaza is an integral part of the occupied Palestinian territories and that any arrangements in the Gaza Strip are to be decided by the Palestinians only, stressing the Palestinian government's total rejection of Israeli attempts to remain in the Gaza Strip or annex any part of it.



36. On 29 November 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador participated in a boardroom lunch in Canberra at the invitation of the Australia Arab Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Members from the Chamber of Commerce expressed their broad solidarity with the Palestinian people during these difficult times, calling on the international community to support a comprehensive and permanent ceasefire.



37. On 10 December 2023, the Palestinian Embassy in Canberra organized a public meeting to commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People at the Islamic School in Canberra. [[Detailed description of this and other related activities can be found in **2023 Activities: Key Activities Responding to Israeli Aggression on Gaza**]
38. On 16 December 2023, the Palestinian Embassy organized an important event to commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People in the city of Brisbane, Queensland.
39. On 22 December 2023, the Palestinian Ambassador and the embassy staff participated in a Rally for Palestine in Gungahlin, ACT, organised by the Canberra Palestinian Community.
40. The Palestinian Ambassador participated in a number of virtual seminars in 2023, covering a variety of important issues including strategic competition between China and the United States, Australia's new military alliances, China's relations with Australia and Pacific countries, European-Australian relations, among others.



41. The General Delegation of Palestine continued to develop and strengthen its media program, including visual, audio, and print media, as well as social media channels. The Embassy regularly published verified information throughout 2023 about the ongoing Israeli violations

of human rights, keeping up with the latest political developments and providing vital background information, including the history of the Palestinian people and their just struggle for freedom and independence against colonial occupation and oppression. The Palestinian Embassy also closely and accurately monitored and reported on the Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip through all social media platforms, such as X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, Facebook, and the embassy's website.

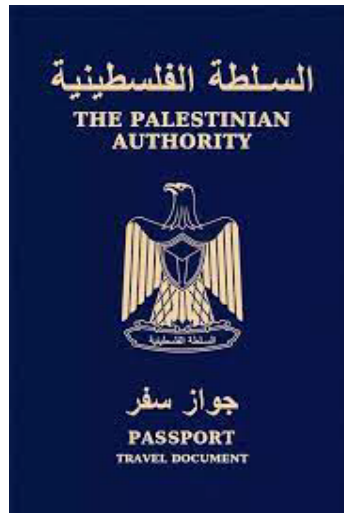
42. The General Delegation of Palestine continued its successful internship program, hosting a number of high-calibre interns from various Australian universities, particularly the Australian National University in Canberra. Interns develop unique professional skills and competencies in the fields of diplomatic work, international relations, foreign policy, and foremostly, the components and elements of the Palestinian cause and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. These interns produce important policy reports on various topics related to the foreign policy of Australia and New Zealand, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, or matters concerning the Arab, Palestinian, and Islamic communities in Australia.

Reports from 2023 explored topics including First Nations foreign policy, the case for Australian recognition of Palestinian statehood, and perspectives of Palestinian and Jewish communities in Australia in this regard. Most interns' reports are available for public access on the Embassy's website.



Consular Affairs, Administrative and Financial Affairs, and Program Management

Throughout the past year, the Palestinian Embassy continued to provide efficient and specialized consular services to applicants, particularly to members of the Palestinian community. The Palestinian Embassy recorded more than 365 different consular transactions completed in 2023, in addition to following up on many other consular matters related to inquiries from the Australian public and members of the Palestinian community.



In this context and against the backdrop of the Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip from October 7 onwards, the Palestinian Embassy closely followed the cases of families in Gaza with relatives in Australia who wished to leave Gaza and travel to Australia. At the onset of the Israeli aggression on Gaza, the Australian government granted temporary visitor visas to some relatives of Palestinian-Australians who were currently residing in Gaza, so that they could join their relatives in Australia.

The Palestinian Embassy in Canberra also made significant efforts to assist these families, whether through continuous communication with the relevant Australian authorities, the Embassy of the State of Palestine in Cairo, the Embassy of the Arab Republic of Egypt in Canberra, or the Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



Australian Government

Hamas-Israel conflict 20 November - Update

Australia has assisted a further **31 people** to cross the Rafah border into Egypt.
We have now assisted **62 people** to depart Gaza.

Australians in need of emergency consular assistance should contact the Australian Government's 24-hour Consular Emergency Centre on +61 2 6261 3305 (from overseas) or 1300 555 135 (from within Australia).

Unfortunately, after just two weeks of these procedures, the Australian government decided to stop providing consular assistance, especially the process of coordinating their exit from Gaza through the Rafah crossing. This policy change made the departure of individuals and families (with valid Australian visas) from Gaza a personal, individual responsibility. The Australian government's abandonment of its consular obligations significantly increased the burden on the Palestinian Embassy to resolve the many related problems faced by the Palestinian community.



The Palestinian Embassy continued to efficiently carry out all necessary administrative activities required for the operation of the Embassy. The Palestinian Embassy also continued to prepare and send periodic reports to the Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs related to improving and advancing its operations.

The Embassy also prepared financial reports periodically and sent them to the Palestinian National Fund.

The Palestinian Embassy also continued to prepare a large number of political reports throughout 2023, which include accurate monitoring and analysis of the latest political developments in Australia, New Zealand, Pacific Nations, and the Indo-Pacific region overall.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs regularly provides instructions and directives to the Embassy, including but not limited to conveying invitations to participate in conferences in Palestine, conveying letters to the Foreign Ministers or Prime Ministers of Australia, New Zealand, and Pacific Nations, requesting information from the governments within the Embassy's mandate regarding the specific positions of these countries, and so on. The Palestinian Embassy continued to respond effectively to the directives and instructions of the Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and implemented them precisely.