



THE HON STEPHEN SMITH MP

MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS
PARLIAMENT HOUSE
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Imam Abdul Moez Alnafti
President
ANIC Executive Committee
Australian National Imams Council
PO Box 145
LAKEMBA NSW 2195

21 JAN 2009

Dear Imam Abdul Moez Alnafti

Thank you for the Australian National Imams Council's (ANIC) letter dated 1 January 2009, about the current situation in the Gaza Strip.

The Australian Government, like ANIC, is gravely concerned by the ongoing impact on civilians of the continuing conflict in the Gaza Strip and southern Israel. The conflict has caused tremendous suffering, particularly for the people of the Gaza Strip.

The Government strongly supports United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1860, which calls for an immediate, durable and fully respected ceasefire. We urge all parties to comply fully with UNSCR 1860.

The Government also supports the intensive efforts being made to bring UNSCR 1860 into practical effect, including by the Governments of Egypt and France, and United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon.

Key objectives must be the halting of Hamas rocket attacks and arms smuggling, and the opening of the Gaza Strip's borders. Israel must meet its humanitarian obligations to ensure the people of the Gaza Strip have access to basic necessities and humanitarian assistance.

On 1 January 2009, the Australian Government announced an immediate commitment of \$5 million in additional assistance to the people of the Gaza Strip. On 13 January, I announced that this assistance - delivered through UN agencies and international non-governmental organisations - will provide immediate cash to displaced families, as well as food and medical supplies to the people of the Gaza Strip.

This assistance is in addition to the doubling of Australian aid to the Palestinian people to \$45 million in 2008. The Australian Government stands ready to consider further help as required.

The current situation highlights that a long term resolution of the situation in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank can only be through adoption of a two-state solution. The Government

supports a two-state solution, based on Israel's right to live in peace within secure borders and recognition of the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people for their own state.

Thank you for bringing the Council's views to the attention of the Government.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Steve Smith', with a horizontal line drawn underneath the name.

Stephen Smith

PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF

PRESS CONFERENCE

COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY OFFICES

SYDNEY

5 JANUARY 2009

E & O E – PROOF ONLY (Gaza Extract only)

JOURNALIST: [inaudible] Gaza [inaudible]

PRIME MINISTER: Australia is deeply concerned by continued violence in Gaza and in Southern Israel. Australia recognises Israel's right to self-defence, while we call on all parties to avoid any actions which result in unnecessary suffering or increased suffering on the part of innocent civilians.

The escalation in the conflict, following the incursion by Israeli ground forces, underlines the absolute importance of bringing about an effective diplomatic solution.

Any solution, any diplomatic solution, must find a way of bringing a halt to rocket attacks against Israel by the terrorist organisation Hamas. Any diplomatic solution must also bring about a halt of armed shipments into Gaza.

Any diplomatic solution must also bring about the opening of the Gaza crossings. Any diplomatic solution must also involve an immediate ceasefire. And in that connection, we the Australian Government support the actions of the United Nations now in seeking to bring about an immediate ceasefire.

Furthermore any diplomatic solution must form part of a longer term compact involving Israel and Palestine, based on a two-State solution.

All Australians are concerned about the humanitarian implications of this conflict. And it is critical therefore for Israel to meet its humanitarian obligations under international humanitarian law towards the people of Gaza, in ensuring that they have access to basic goods, food and humanitarian assistance and medical supplies.

The Australian Government has already in the last 12 months have doubled our level of assistance to the Palestinian people to nearly \$50 million. And on 1 January, the Government announced a further allocation of \$5 million for additional assistance to

the people on the Gaza Strip. This is designed specifically to be delivered through UN agencies and international non-government organisations to provide food and much needed medical supplies to the people of Gaza.

The Australian Government also stands ready to deliver further assistance as is necessary.

Okay. Thank you.

[Ends]

Acting Prime Minister Julia Gillard

Interview with Waleed Aly

ABC 744 Melbourne

08 January 2009

E&OE (Gaza extract only)

WALEED ALY: Just to move on to the situation in Gaza. We've done a lot about that over the course of the week, so we're not going to talk about it at length but I'm interested in Australia's response to this because initially it seemed Australia's response was almost, to say very, almost nothing really. And then the EU stepped in and tried to broker a ceasefire and Australia then jumped on board and said well yes we support that kind of diplomatic initiative. Why was Australia following rather than actually staking out a position of its own [inaudible]?

JULIA GILLARD: We've been commenting on this constantly as the situation has emerged. In the very early days of the resumption of violence we were there saying that we wanted to see a ceasefire, we supported the call of the UN Security Council for a ceasefire...

WALEED ALY: But your initial response was to say that well, nearly that Hamas broke a ceasefire and Israel responded. It wasn't to call for a ceasefire straight away. The call for a ceasefire came after there had been calls from around the world, I guess is what I am saying.

JULIA GILLARD: Our position consistently was to call for a halt to violence from the earliest days of this conflict we were calling for a halt to violence. I did say in the early days and I would happily say it now that obviously there was Hamas shelling into Southern Israel and Israel responded.

We've seen an escalation of action since. We've said consistently that we want to see a ceasefire that is lasting and durable. We would welcome in that regard the initiatives of Egypt on trying to work on a ceasefire as well as the others who have been involved in discussions, of course the EU, the UN and the US have all been there trying to broker a ceasefire arrangement.

WALEED ALY: What role does Australia play in this sort of thing? What role can Australia play in an international crisis like this?

JULIA GILLARD: Well in this international crisis first and foremost we've provided and extra \$5 million of humanitarian assistance to the people of Gaza. That comes on top of \$45 million of assistance provided to the Palestinian people in 2008. I think people watching their TV screens would have been moved by the humanitarian circumstances facing the people there.

So we are there with more assistance, to provide food and medical supplies. That money is being made available through the UN, through the Red Cross, through the World Food Organisation.

Then of course as a member of the UN we have our voice heard in the UN Chambers and Councils as these issues are discussed. Indeed as recently as the last 24 hours we made a statement in the United Nations recording this nation's deep concern about the escalation of violence, our desire to see a lasting ceasefire arrangement, one that would have an end to shelling into Southern Israel by Hamas and other militant groups, an opening of borders and end of arms shipments into Gaza. We want to see a lasting arrangement that brings peace.

WALEED ALY: Well I think we all want to see a lasting agreement that brings peace, the question is how, I guess.

JULIA GILLARD: On the question of how, I think it is to be welcomed that Israel has said it would consider what is being put forward by Egypt and I think that does need to be welcomed and we will see what happens there in the coming few days.



**MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS
STEPHEN SMITH, MP**

TRANSCRIPTION: PROOF COPY E & OE (Only Gaza points)

DATE: 16 January 2009
Press Conference – Perth

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QUESTION: Are you going to make any representations to the Israeli Government, after the destruction of the UN building?

STEPHEN SMITH: Well, in the past couple of weeks, Acting Prime Minister Gillard spoke to Prime Minister Olmert, and I made the point earlier in the week that so far as this particular conflict was concerned, that was essentially the conversation or the communication between the two governments at a minister to minister, or Prime Minister, Acting Prime Minister level.

Our view on the conflict in Gaza has been made quite clear, crystal clear by the Prime Minister, the Acting Prime Minister and by me.

So far as the attack upon the UNRWA headquarters in Gaza, can I make a number of points.

Firstly, any damage done to a UN facility, whether that damage is deliberate or inadvertent, any damage done to a UN facility is both disturbing and very, very regrettable. That's the first point.

Secondly, I note that Prime Minister Olmert, in his remarks to UN Secretary Ban, which have been made public, has apologised for the damage done to the UNWRA headquarters in Gaza and I think that apology was appropriate.

I think more generally, it makes the point that whether it's a UN building which is damaged, whether it is civilians who are injured or killed, and whether those civilians are in Gaza or in Israel, it underlines the point yet again that what we require here is an immediate ceasefire, an immediate implementation of this United Nation's Security Council resolution 1860.

And we continue to urge upon all the parties to bring that resolution to practical effect. And that's why we've been strongly supportive of the efforts of the so-called Quartet, the UN, the US, the UK and Russia; and the EU and also France and Egypt, in trying to bring about a practical, durable and fully respected ceasefire.

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[Ends]

E&OE

13 January 2009

Press Conference – Parliament House, Canberra

(Edited to only include Gaza points)

STEPHEN SMITH: Well thanks very much for coming.

As you know, I've been on leave over the Christmas New Year break. I returned from leave yesterday, and I wanted today to make some remarks about a number of issues that have been current over the Christmas New Year period.

Of course, as you'd be aware, the Acting Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, has been acting Foreign Minister, and can I thank her for that.

Can I start with Gaza. Can I firstly again underline and reinforce the comments made by both the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister on this matter.

The Australian Government remains very concerned about the situation in Gaza.

We are strongly supportive of the United Nations Security Council resolution 1860 - a unanimous resolution which calls for an immediate, durable and fully respected ceasefire, and we welcome very much and support very much the efforts, the international diplomatic efforts being made to turn that resolution into practical effect.

In particular, we welcome the efforts of the Egyptian and French Presidents. We welcome the efforts of the Quartet envoy, Tony Blair. And of course we welcome the efforts of Secretary General Ban, who arrives in the region today.

Can I also say we of course remain very concerned about the humanitarian situation in Gaza and Julia Gillard, in my absence, indicated early in the new year that in addition to the \$45 million which Australia made available in humanitarian assistance for the people of Gaza in the course of last year, that \$45 million was of course a doubling of our humanitarian assistance effort, \$5 million will be made available for humanitarian assistance as a result of the current immediate conflict.

I can announce that today the distribution of that \$5 million will be \$2 million to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, to UNRWA, \$1.5 million to the World Food Program, and \$1.5 million to the Red Cross.

The \$2 million to UNRWA will be used for immediate cash assistance to displaced families. The \$1.5 million with the World Food Programme will be used for immediate and urgent food shortages and \$1.5 million for the Red Cross will be used for medical and other necessary supplies. We expect that those funds will be made available to those agencies in the course of this week.

As I say, we strongly support United Nations Security Council resolution 1860, unanimously supported by the Security Council, and we continue to urge that resolution on all the parties, and we continue to support the efforts being made internationally to bring that to practical effect.

...

SMITH: Ross?

JOURNALIST: On the Gaza situation, are you angry or frustrated that both sides have ignored the UN resolution?

SMITH: Well, we certainly call upon both parties to the dispute to comply with the Security Council resolution. Now both parties, as you've indicated, are not proposing to do that.

I think it's fair to make this point: that, everyone in the international community appreciates that when a unanimous resolution was passed, the key then became putting that resolution into practical effect. And that's why we applaud the efforts of the Egyptians, of the French, of the Quartet to try and bring that resolution to a practical effect.

But we strongly support the Security Council resolution 1860, both in terms of a ceasefire durable and fully respected, but also in terms of the humanitarian needs so far as the people of Gaza are concerned.

JOURNALIST: Minister, the Government's taken a moderate line despite the escalation, the Israeli escalation of its operations in Gaza. Why wasn't there a condemnation, for example, of the attack on the UN school?

SMITH: Well, from the first moment, the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister, the Acting Prime Minister, and on this, my first occasion, I make the point, which we've made repeatedly, that when you have such conflicts, it is incumbent upon all parties to do everything they can to ensure that civilian casualties are avoided. Now, we have seen terrible civilian casualties.

I think it's true to make this point, that when Australians see civilian casualties, whether they are casualties from Gaza, whether they are casualties from Israel, Australians are horrified by those casualties.

The only way we will stop casualties, whether it's in Gaza, whether it's in Israel, in the Middle East itself, is by two things: in the short term, a ceasefire which is durable and fully respected and, secondly, a long term solution which sees a two nation-state solution. A nation state for Israel within secure borders, fully respected, and a nation state for the Palestinian people.

That's the Australian Government's and Australia's longstanding position. And we've made the point from day one, the Prime Minister, the Acting Prime Minister, that in the course of these conflicts, conflicts of this nature, the parties concerned should do everything they can to avoid civilian casualties.

Now, on a number of instances, allegations or suggestions of atrocities have been made. The Israeli defence forces have indicated that they are in the process of preliminary investigations on some of those allegations.

The Australian Government supports a proper investigation of any of those allegations. We expect that all parties to the conflict will abide by and respect international law and international humanitarian law.

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JOURNALIST: In Gaza, you referred to terrible civilian casualties, and Australians are horrified at it. Does Australia condemn the use of phosphorous bombs against civilian targets?

SMITH: Well, firstly I see that allegation has been made. I've also seen denials by Israeli authorities that phosphorous has been used.

As I understand the international law of war, limited use of phosphorous is consistent with international law. Whether the Israelis have used phosphorous in the current conflict, and if so, whether that use has been consistent with international law, is not something that I have knowledge of. But it is something which, as I indicated earlier, where allegations have been made about breaches of humanitarian law or international law, they should be the subject of investigation, and the Israeli Defence Forces have indicated they are conducting a preliminary investigation into a range of suggested allegations.

But I do note that the Israeli authorities have indicated that they're not using white phosphorous in the manner that has been suggested publicly.

JOURNALIST: Have you spoken to your Israel counterpart? Do you have any intention to? Or has there been any government...

SMITH: Over the break, the Acting Prime Minister spoke with Prime Minister Olmert. That was in early January - I'm happy to stand corrected - my memory was the 5th or the 6th of January. And that's been, if you like, the Heads of Government contact between Australia and Israel for the purposes of this conflict.

...

JOURNALIST: The Government says that it recognises Israel's right to defend itself in the current circumstances...

SMITH: Well, the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister made that point abundantly clear, as do I.

JOURNALIST: Isn't Israel at risk of overstepping...[inaudible]

SMITH: Let me make a couple of general points. I certainly regard the cause of the current conflict as being Hamas' refusal to continue with the ceasefire or the so-called lull, and as a consequence of that, 300 rockets from Hamas going into Israel at the end of 2008. I certainly regard that as the cause of the immediate conflict.

But let me make this point. Whether it's conflict in Gaza now where we see terrible civilian casualties or conflict in Israel or suicide bombers or terrorist attacks in Israel itself where we see civilian casualties, none of this will change unless and until we have two things: in the short term, the implementation of UN Security Council resolution 1860, which would see an immediate and durable and fully respected ceasefire; but secondly and more importantly, the adoption of a two-nation-state solution - a nation state for Israel, secure within defined borders, and a nation state for the Palestinian people.

I frankly don't regard the launching of 300 rockets into Israel in the course of December as coming from an organisation which respects the right of Israel to exist as a nation state.

Now, having said all of that, I think it's very important here that we look to the future, which is why we strongly support the United Nations Security Council unanimous resolution, and we strongly support all the efforts by the Quartet - the UK, the US, the EU and Russia - and the efforts by Egypt and France, to bring about an immediate ceasefire which would see that durable and fully respected,

and then the international community to continue to get behind the long-term peace efforts, whether it's the Arab peace proposal or the Annapolis proposals.

I read parts of the contribution by Foreign Secretary Miliband in the House of Commons overnight. And he made this point, which I think is a very telling point: If we're in the business of condemnation, we all stand condemned, the international community stands condemned for its failure, not over weeks or months or years, but over decades for the international community's failure to bring about a lasting and durable peace in the Middle East.

That is the only thing which will stop these sorts of terrible events from occurring.

As I say, whether the victims are Palestinian people in Gaza or Israelis or Palestinian people in Israel or in the West Bank, the only way we will stop these terrible atrocities occurring is a long-term, durable peace process which is predicated on the basis of fully respecting two nation states, a nation state for Israel and a nation state for the Palestinian people.

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[Ends]



**MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS
STEPHEN SMITH, MP**

TRANSCRIPTION: PROOF COPY E & OE (Only Gaza points)

DATE: 19 January 2009

**Joint Media Conference – Canberra
with Netherlands Foreign Minister Maxime Verhagen**

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QUESTION: I've only got one other question, and that's Gaza. Do you think that truce can hold?

SMITH: Well, Gaza was obviously an item that Maxime and I discussed this morning. Yesterday I welcomed the unilateral ceasefire by the Israeli Government. Today I welcome the indication of a ceasefire by Hamas. We hope that leads to fighting ceasing immediately. But we also hope that the cessation in fighting leads to a durable ceasefire.

We strongly support United Nations Security Council Resolution 1860 which has, as its hallmark, a durable and sustainable and fully effective ceasefire.

We think in the short-term that if that can be achieved. And we support the diplomatic efforts going into achieving that, that are occurring in Cairo under the auspices of the Egyptian Government, we strongly support that. But if that can be achieved, then that does, we think, set the scene for renewed efforts at the broader peace process. And I'm hopeful that will occur under the new United States Administration.

When we see these terrible tragedies, whether it's civilian victims in Gaza or civilian victims in Israel, these terrible tragedies will only stop historically if we can effect a two-nation solution: a nation state for Israel within defined borders, subject to peace and security; and a nation state for the Palestinian people under the same terms and conditions.

I think this is view which, in very general, in general terms that the Netherlands and the European Union share.