

## - Middle East -

### S E N A T E

#### Greens Senator Kerry Nettle puts questions to Labor Senator John Faulkner on the Australian Government's approach to Israel/Palestine

**Senator NETTLE** (2.43 pm) — My question is to Senator Faulkner as the Minister representing the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Can you explain how the approach of this government to ensuring that there is a just peace in Palestine and in Israel differs from the approach of the previous government?

**Senator FAULKNER** — As I understand it, the senator asked me how the current government's approach to Palestine differs from that of the previous government. Can I say in relation to this particular issue — Senator Kemp — Just take a moment to find the brief.

**Senator FAULKNER** — I can't, so I won't worry about that. What I will say is that Australia is a strong supporter of the Middle East peace process. I can say to the Senate that Australia is deeply concerned at the recent violence in Gaza and southern Israel as well as the appalling situation where eight students were killed in Jerusalem. I can also say that it is the view of the government that this only undermines the peace process. It is the government's view that Israel, like every other state, has a right to self-defence, and in our view the rocket attacks on Israel were terrorist attacks which only serve to perpetuate violence and suffering in Israel. We obviously have a view that they should cease immediately. I cannot speak for the previous government but I would be surprised if any senator or member from the previous government would have any difference in view from the one I have just expressed to the chamber. But I can also say that the government is obviously concerned about the humanitarian situation in Gaza that has resulted from the escalating tensions and by the suffering this has caused the people of Gaza. Every effort should be made to avoid the suffering of innocent civilians. The current government has taken the approach to urge all parties to rededicate their commitment to the peace negotiations that were launched, I think, at Annapolis, which remain the best hope for a just and lasting solution to the conflict. We continue to urge both parties to make rapid progress in implementing the roadmap. We encourage both parties to prevent day-to-day developments from undermining their shared objective of an Israeli-Palestinian agreement by the end of 2008.

Senator Nettle asked me to comment on the previous government's policies. I have put as forthrightly as I can the approach of the current government, and I am sure most of these views are shared all around the chamber. I cannot comment on the previous government's policies in this area—and I do not want to—but I want to make those points as clearly as I can to Senator Nettle and the Senate.

**Senator NETTLE**—Mr President, I ask a supplementary question. I wonder whether the minister could outline what representations the Australian government has made to the Israeli government in relation to the humanitarian situation in Gaza. What is the Australian government's view of the recent announcements to expand the construction of settlements in the West Bank?

**Senator FAULKNER**—I can say in response to Senator Nettle's supplementary question that I do believe that Australia is playing its part in the peace process. We have doubled our aid to the Palestinian territories to A\$45 million in 2008. Our aid will be dispersed through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East and also through NGOs, as I understand it, and a multidonor trust fund that is being managed by the World Bank. It will go to helping with the improvement of essential services such as basic health care, food and security and also to promote democracy and good governance.