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Australian Government

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

The Hon Tim Watts MP

His Excellency Mr. Mohammed Bahr Al-Uloom, Undersecretary for Bilateral Relations

18:00 (AEDT) [10:00 Baghdad], Thursday, 19 October 2023

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Background

Iraq's response

The Government of Iraq characterised Hamas' attack as a 'natural result of...systematic oppression' of the Palestinian people. On 7 October 2023, Prime Minister Mohammed al-Sudani released a statement reaffirming Iraq's support of the Palestinian cause. Solidarity protests have been well-attended. The Iraqi Government has condemned Israel for targeting civilians, and on 18 October, announced three days of mourning in response to the strike on the Al-Ahli Baptist Hospital.

As Israel's air strikes have continued, statements by Prime Minister Sudani have emphasised the international community's responsibility to intervene, the need to to avoid regional escalation, and alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people. Iraq has pledged humanitarian aid to Gaza, including medical supplies, to be coordinated with Egypt. Several Iraqi militias have threatened to target US interests if it provides military support to Israel.

On 9 October, Sudani called for an emergency session of the Arab League and, with Iran, for a special session of the OIC. Iraq is closely engaging with Iran (and statements by PM Sudani have reportedly been influenced by discussions with Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian). Iranian-backed militia in Iraq have provided rhetorical, and possibly material, support to Hamas.

Australia's response

Prime Minister Albanese announced assisted departure flights on 11 October 2023, and has also addressed media on multiple occasions. We have publicly condemned Hamas' attacks, called for hostages to be released and, as the conflict has continued, emphasised the need for civilians to be protected and international law to be observed at all times. Following the Al-Ahli hospital explosion, Prime Minister Albanese said "every innocent life matters – whether it is Israeli or Palestinian... the protection of civilian lives must come first... and

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respect for international law is paramount. We condemn any indiscriminate attacks and targeting of civilian infrastructure, including hospitals. And Australia joins with others in calling for international law to always be upheld".

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Title: Israel-Hamas conflict: 18 October: Doha

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6. s 33(a)(iii), s 33(b) , we note that Qatar's MFA issued a statement on 17 October which 'condemns in the strongest terms the Israeli occupation's bombing of Al Ahli Baptist hospital in Gaza, and considers it a brutal massacre, a heinous crime against defenceless civilians, and a flagrant violation of the provisions of international law and international humanitarian law' (Qatar Condemns in the Strongest Terms the Israeli Occupation's Bombing of Al-Ahli Baptist Hospital in Gaza (mofa.gov.qa))

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Title: **Israel-Hamas Conflict: Iraqi Reactions**
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Reactions to Hospital Explosion in Gaza

4. s 33(a)(iii), s 33(b)
Condemnation has been swift and widespread. Prime Minister Sudani declared an official three-day mourning period.

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Title: **Israel-Hamas conflict: 18 October update**
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Gaza hospital explosion

3. Following the explosion at the Al-Ahli Baptist Hospital in Gaza City on the evening of 17 October, the IDF Spokesperson's Unit disseminated online a large body of material - including videos, and voice recordings and transcripts of conversations between Hamas operatives - to demonstrate that the explosion was a result of a failed Islamic Jihad rocket.

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s 33(a)(iii), s 33(b)

4. President Biden supported Israel's assertion during his visit, but the fallout from the explosion was immediate: cancellation of the regional leaders summit in Jordan; cancellation of bilateral meetings with Mahmoud Abbas, King Abdullah, and President al-Sisi; strong statements from Saudi Arabia and the UAE; and planned protests across the West Bank and in the region.

s 33(a)(iii)

s 33(a)(iii), s 33(b)

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Title: **Addis Ababa: Reactions to the Hamas-Israel Conflict**
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3. On 15 October, in the wake of escalating conflict, the AU Commission (AUC) issued a more strongly worded statement (attached) with the League of Arab States (LAS), calling for the immediate cessation of hostilities in Gaza and for the provision of urgent humanitarian assistance to Palestinians. The AUC and LAS expressed grave concern about Israeli orders for those in Gaza to leave their homes, describing them as "contrary to international law", and underscored that an "Israeli invasion" would cause significant civilian casualties,

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amounting to a "genocide of unprecedented proportions". The statement urged the creation of a humanitarian corridor to Gaza. On 18 October, Faki released a tweet accusing Israel of a "war crime", condemning the strike on al-Ahli Hospital in Gaza, and again urging action by the international community.

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s 22(1)(a)(ii)

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Title: United States: Israel-Hamas conflict: President Biden's travel to Israel

s 33(a)(iii), s 33(b)

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s 33(a)(iii), s 33(b)

5. Biden reiterated his commitment to asking Congress this week for an "unprecedented" support package to bolster Israel's defence, including resupplying the Iron Dome air defence system. He reiterated previous messaging there were currently no plans to engage US troops in Israel. The White House would not elaborate on what would trigger the use of US military force. On the hospital explosion, Biden cited US Defense intelligence pointing to a terrorist group in Gaza, rather than to Israel. He refused to respond to media questions on whether Israel had followed international law in their campaign over the past 10 or so days.

s 33(a)(iii), s 33(b)

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s 33(a)(iii), s 33(b)

text ends
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Title: **Bangladesh: Hamas-Israel conflict - Bangladesh supports Palestine**

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s 33(a)(iii)

On 18 October, Prime Minister Hasina condemned the attack on the Al-Ahli al-Arabi hospital in Gaza and announced Bangladesh would provide medical assistance to Palestinians. A 18 October statement published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) (attached) blamed Israel for the attack on the hospital. Foreign Minister Momen, at an Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) meeting in Jeddah, called for the UN Security Council to hold Israel accountable for war crimes against Palestinians.

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Title: **UNSC: Israel-Hamas conflict - Middle East on brink**
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8. The **US** expressed outrage and sadness about the explosion at the Al Ahli hospital, saying fact-finding efforts continued. Its current assessment was that Israel was not responsible. The US stood unequivocally for the protection of civilian life during conflict. But Hamas was responsible for the war. US leaders were in the region and deeply engaged on the issues. The **UK** also expressed shock and sadness at the deaths and destruction at the Al Ahli hospital and was working to establish the facts. But hospitals were protected under international law and should not be targeted. It reiterated Israel had the right of self-defence, the need for protection of civilians, and called for unimpeded humanitarian access. Further escalation had to be avoided. **France** made broadly similar points.

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Title: **Israel-Hamas Conflict: Further developments and reactions - Geneva UN**

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3. Following the Baptist Al Ahli hospital blast, the **Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine** to the UN in Geneva circulated a letter (attached) to all Permanent Missions criticising "the wave of disinformation being spewed out by Israel's propaganda machine".

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The letter blamed an Israeli airstrike for the blast, claiming that it targeted over 500 patients, health workers and families seeking refuge in and around the hospital.

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Title: **Title: Israel-Hamas conflict: EU responses: 16–19 October**

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s 33(a)(i), s 33(a)(iii), s 33(b)

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7. s 33(a)(iii), s 33(b) the Israeli Embassy in Brussels had since shared with him and others in the EU system a briefing with accompanying imagery and audio that 'proved' the attack was not at the hands of Israel s 33(a)(iii), s 33(b) But while US President Biden had said 'the other team' was responsible, the EU had not yet taken a position, Mann said.

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