

AUGUST 2020: ISSUE #3

AUSTRALIA AT THE UN



Photo courtesy: UN Photo/Manuel Elias

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Message from Ambassador The Hon Mitch Fifield

Like everyone who saw footage of the blast and its aftermath, I was deeply shocked and saddened by the recent explosion at the port of Beirut.

On behalf of the Australian Mission, I would like to express our sincere condolences to the families and friends of all those lost and injured.

Australia is home to a vibrant Lebanese community, with more than 230,000 Australians claiming Lebanese heritage. As Australia's Foreign Minister Marise Payne noted, this tragedy will affect many people in both countries.

Having marked **World Humanitarian Day** this month, the blast is a reminder of the vital role humanitarian workers perform in a crisis. In Beirut, UN humanitarian agencies and NGOs were among the first to respond, providing critical services, support and care to those impacted. We extend our thanks to the humanitarian aid workers on the ground in Beirut and those on the front lines in every corner of the globe – they are real-life heroes.

I would also like to commend our colleagues at the Australian Embassy in Beirut for continuing their work in difficult circumstances. Led by Ambassador Rebekah Grindlay, the team continues to support Australians living and working in Lebanon and coordinating Australia's humanitarian assistance, including the delivery of urgently needed supplies (read on to learn more).

Earlier this month, governments, organisations and citizens around the world marked **International Youth Day**. This year's theme - "Youth Engagement for Global Action" - recognised the importance of youth participation in local, national and global decision-making bodies.

Young people will be among those most impacted by the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the myriad of emerging challenges facing the international community. It is critical they have a say in how we respond and I look forward to hearing directly from the next generation of leaders at the UN Youth Plenary next month.

This month the Australian Mission bid farewell to Ambassador Tegan Brink, Australia's Deputy Permanent Representative and Deputy Head of Mission. Tegan made an invaluable contribution during her more than three years with the Mission and will be missed by all of us.

Thankfully Tegan hasn't gone too far, heading down the road to join the UN Secretariat as Chef de Cabinet to the 75th President of the General Assembly, Volkan Bozkir. We wish her the best of luck in the new role and look forward to working together throughout UNGA75.

We are also pleased to welcome Julia Feeney to the Mission this month. Julia will take over as DPR until early 2021 and brings a wealth of experience across a range of issues, including climate policy.

Delegates gather at UNHQ to elect ITLOS judges

Delegates were back at UNHQ in August for the 30th Meeting of States Parties to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

With social-distancing measures in place, delegates gathered in the General Assembly Hall for the first in-person plenary meeting since March.

On the agenda this month was the election of seven judges to the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS).

An independent judiciary, the Tribunal is composed of 21 members and is vital to the peaceful resolution of disputes related to the interpretation and application of UNCLOS.



After three days of balloting, seven judges - spanning each of the regional groupings plus a 'floating' seat - were elected for nine-year terms.

Despite the health and safety challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, the measures put in place by the Bureau and the Secretariat enabled a safe voting process.

Australia was pleased to make a contribution to the meeting, with an officer from the Mission serving on the Bureau as a meeting Vice-President and another as an election teller.



Photos courtesy: UN Photo/Manuel Elias

Australia announces its support for early and equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines

The continued spread and reemergence of COVID-19 – despite the best efforts of nations to suppress the virus within their borders – has highlighted the critical importance of an effective vaccine.

Early and equitable access to effective vaccines will be key to not only stopping the spread of the virus, but also to reopening borders and kick-starting the global economic recovery.

This month Australia was pleased to announce a contribution of AUD\$80 million in support of the COVAX Advance Market Commitment (AMC) led by Gavi, the vaccine alliance.

The COVAX AMC, which forms part of the **COVAX Facility**, will play a critical role in supporting lower-income countries and eligible small economies to access safe, effective and affordable vaccines for their highest risk groups.

Announcing Australia's contribution, Foreign Minister Marise Payne stressed the importance of continued international cooperation on vaccine development and distribution.

"International investment in vaccine manufacturing and procurement is stronger when nations work together. In making this investment, Australia joins key donors such as the United Kingdom, Canada, Italy and Norway," Minister Payne said.



According to Gavi, funding for the COVAX AMC will be critical to ensuring that ability to pay does not become a barrier to accessing COVID-19 vaccines, a situation that would leave the majority of the world unprotected, and allow the pandemic to continue unabated.

The world faces major challenges in developing, manufacturing and equitably distributing COVID-19 vaccines, treatments and diagnostics.

Multilateral initiatives, such as the COVAX AMC, will be instrumental in avoiding "vaccine nationalism" and ensuring all countries gain equitable access to safe, effective and affordable vaccines and treatments.



Further information on the Gavi COVAX Facility, including the COVAX AMC is [available here](#).



Australian Defence Force aircraft delivers humanitarian aid in wake of Beirut explosion

Humanitarian agencies and donors were quick to mobilise in the aftermath of the catastrophic explosion at the Port of Beirut.

Earlier this month, an Australian Defence Force C-130J Hercules aircraft was called into action to support Australia's humanitarian partners on-the-ground.

Touching down in Beirut only days after the explosion, the Hercules aircraft delivered much-needed supplies direct from the UN's Humanitarian Response Depot in Dubai.

The first delivery included mobile warehouses to help replace storage facilities destroyed in the blast, and shelter kits and tools to help the estimated 300,000 people left homeless by the explosion.

So far, the Hercules aircraft has made three trips to Lebanon and remains stationed in the Middle East, ready to be called upon to provide further logistics support.

The Australian Government has also committed AUD\$5 million to our humanitarian partners assisting in Lebanon, including the World Food Programme, Red Cross Movement and UNICEF.



Further information on Australia's humanitarian support for the people of Lebanon and details on how individuals can contribute to recovery efforts is [available here](#).

