



19

**PRIME MINISTER**

77/94

**STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP****THE AUSTRALIAN EMBASSY BEIRUT**

I am pleased to announce the Government has agreed in principle to re-open the Australian Embassy in Beirut in 1995. The Government is planning that the Embassy will be operational by around July next year.

The Embassy was closed in 1984 as a result of the deteriorating security situation caused by Lebanon's civil war. Since then, Australia's interests in Lebanon have been handled through the Australian Embassy in Damascus. A small non-diplomatic office was established in Beirut in January 1993 to assist with visa processing and consular services.

The decision will be of immediate assistance to the 250,000 people of Lebanese origin who live in Australia and who have a strong interest in ease of communications between Australia and Lebanon.

The Government's decision to re-establish an official Australian diplomatic presence in Beirut represents an expression of confidence in Lebanon's future and in the prospects for Australia's relations with Lebanon.

Australia has welcomed the recent positive developments in the Middle East peace process and hopes that these developments will provide the impetus for the early conclusion of a comprehensive settlement, including a peace treaty between Lebanon and Israel. Australia also hopes that the Lebanese Government will press ahead with its program of national reconciliation after nearly two decades of sectarian conflict.

The presence of an Australian Embassy in Beirut will help to foster trade and commercial links between the two countries. Lebanon's reconstruction program offers many opportunities for foreign construction and engineering companies. The Government hopes that Australian companies will be able to compete more effectively for a part in Lebanon's reconstruction with the assistance that an official Australian presence in Beirut can provide.

**CANBERRA**  
23 August 1994