



Joint Statement on the Occasion of the 60th Anniversary of Australia-Egypt Relations

11 December 2010

The Hon Kevin Rudd MP, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Commonwealth of Australia, and His Excellency Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Arab Republic of Egypt, held a bilateral meeting in Cairo on 11 December 2010, during Mr Rudd's visit to Egypt.

During his visit to Cairo, Mr Rudd also met with His Excellency Hosni Mubarak, President of the Arab Republic of Egypt.

In their meeting, Mr Rudd and Mr Aboul Gheit welcomed the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Australia and Egypt and agreed that the bilateral relationship was long-standing, diverse and of importance to both countries. It was based on a long history of cooperation on regional peace and security, growing trade and investment relations and warm people-to-people links.

Mr Rudd noted that Egypt's geography had played a vital part in Australia's growth as a nation. From 1869, traffic between Europe and Australia passed through Egypt's Suez Canal, significantly shortening travel times and bolstering Australia's population and trade. Cairo was also the main air link from London to Sydney for many years. In 1950, Australia established its first Embassy in the Arab world in Cairo – an early recognition of the importance of the relationship.

The Ministers commented warmly on growing people-to-people links, which they agreed helped enhance understanding and goodwill between Australians and Egyptians. Mr Rudd highlighted the contribution to all aspects of Australian society made by the approximately 33,000 Egyptian Australians and tens of thousands more with Egyptian ancestry. Mr Aboul Gheit noted that more than 60,000 Australians visit Egypt each year – a significant number given the geographical distance between both countries.

Mr Rudd welcomed the announcement that Egypt would open an exhibition of Tutankhamun's treasures at the Melbourne Museum in April 2011. This would represent a significant opportunity to enhance cultural ties between Australia and Egypt and to enable millions of Australians to see first-hand Egyptian antiquities of global significance. Mr Aboul Gheit noted with appreciation the work of Australian archaeologists in Egypt. Mr Rudd also met with Dr Zahi Hawass, Secretary General of the Supreme Council of Antiquities.

Mr Rudd and Mr Aboul Gheit agreed that trade and investment ties, particularly in agriculture and resources, were an important and growing part of the bilateral relationship. Two way merchandise trade stood at A\$436 million in 2009-10. Trade in services was also growing steadily, in particular education services, with more than 1600 Egyptian students currently enrolled in Australian educational institutions.

In the area of education, Mr Rudd was pleased to announce that Egypt will have access to Australia Awards from 2011. These scholarships would include both short-term and long-term study and will further strengthen the bilateral educational and research relationship, and help build the capacity of Egypt's next generation of leaders.

Ministers welcomed the long-term investment by Australian company Centamin in Egypt's Sukari gold mine, now one of the ten largest gold mines in the world. Ministers viewed the minerals sector as an important area for potential further Australian investment.

Mr Aboul Gheit welcomed Australia's historical and continuing contribution to regional peace and security. During his visit to Egypt, Mr Rudd visited the Australian Defence Force personnel serving with the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) in Sinai. Australia was an original participant in the MFO, with an Australian Defence Force helicopter contingent deployed in March 1982 for four years, and a subsequent continual presence since 1992. Australia was proud to be one of a small number of countries to have served with this Force, a tangible demonstration of Australia's practical contribution to regional peace.

Mr Rudd emphasised Australia's ongoing commitment to the MFO, which Australia viewed as an integral part of international efforts to support peace and stability in the Middle East.

Mr Rudd announced that Australia would provide \$250,000 for technical assistance through the United Nations Development Programme, to assist Egypt's demining efforts in the Western Desert, where Australia has a historical connection given the participation of Australian troops in the Western Desert arena of WWII.

Mr Rudd and Mr Aboul Gheit said Australia and Egypt would continue to exchange views on addressing terrorist threats and on regional security issues.

Mr Rudd and Mr Aboul Gheit agreed that Australia and Egypt shared a mutual interest in food security. As a demonstration of practical cooperation between the two countries in this area, the Ministers agreed that Australia and Egypt would explore opportunities to work together on bilateral and trilateral activities to support improved agricultural productivity. The two countries would also engage in dialogue on ways in which to better address food security issues at the multilateral level through a range of relevant fora, including the UN, the FAO and the WTO. Recognising the importance of open and efficient markets for global food security, Mr Rudd noted the constructive role played by Egypt in the WTO agriculture negotiations, particularly as leader of the African Group in 2009.

Mr Rudd and Mr Aboul Gheit agreed on the necessity of moving forward urgently with direct negotiations in the Middle East peace process with a view to implementing the two-state solution and for both sides to refrain from actions that are unhelpful to that process, including settlement activities. Mr Rudd highlighted that Australia had significantly increased its assistance to the Palestinian people in recent years, totalling more than A\$146 million since 2007 in humanitarian aid and direct assistance to the Palestinian Authority to help build capacity and institutions necessary for a viable Palestinian state and as a practical contribution to the Middle East peace process.

Mr Rudd and Mr Aboul Gheit agreed that the situation in Sudan was of concern. They agreed that the Comprehensive Peace Agreement must be implemented fully to allow the people of Sudan to choose their future in a free and transparent process that reflects the will of the people of Southern Sudan, which should be respected in order to allow Sudan to focus on its economic development. Mr Rudd and Mr Aboul Gheit agreed that all parties should work to bring about peace and stability in Darfur.

Mr Rudd welcomed Egypt's positive and wide-ranging influence in the region. Egypt was an active contributor to regional peace and security through its key role in the Middle East peace process, its practical contribution to peacekeeping such as through the deployment of more than 4000 personnel with the UN missions in Sudan, and as a leading member of the African Union and Arab League.

The Ministers reaffirmed their goal of a world free from nuclear weapons and their commitment to the global non-proliferation regime. They welcomed the commitment made during the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference in May on the hosting of a Conference in 2012 on the establishment of a zone free of all weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East.

The Ministers noted Egypt's program for developing its planned peaceful nuclear energy program and welcomed the important role of an Australian company as consultant for managing Egypt's nuclear power plant program.

Both Ministers were seized of this historic moment in Australia-Egypt relations and resolved to deepen even further cooperation in years to come.