

The Gaza conflict and the Greek connection

While the Gaza conflict continues to drag on between Israel and the Hamas militants in the Gaza strip, there has been a strong condemnation by Greece of the violence, saying that a ceasefire between the two factions should take place immediately. Foreign Minister Dora Bakoyanni has stated that Greece will be helping evacuate some of the most injured children from the conflict and offer them medical care in hospitals in Greece.

From Cyprus, another Greek flagged vessel full of aid, doctors and activists left the port of Larnaca for Gaza on Monday but turned back after a generator blew out.

In regards to the small diaspora that resides in the area, the president of the diaspora association there are approximately 60 Greek women who live in Gaza or the West Bank. Amongst the Greeks that live in the area is Evangelia Kaffe-

Alawneh, a humanitarian who runs the small Greke cultural center in the West Bank and teaches Greek to Palestinian children.

Greece has said that it will continue to keep a close eye on events and take any necessary measures to evacuate Greeks if need be.

There have been several protests in Greece and Cyprus about the conflict, the majority of them being pro Palestinian.

MISSING CHILD PARENTAL ABDUCTION AUSTRALIA

ANDREW JOHN THOMPSON

Missing Since: April 2008

Age: 4

Missing From: AUSTRALIA

Sex: Male

Eye Color: Brown

Hair Color: Fair

Race: White

Birth Date: 19 August 2004

Andrew John THOMPSON was taken from Australia in April 2008 by Melinda Margaret THOMPSON (nee Melinda Margaret STRATTON) and have not been seen or heard from since then. Both are Australian Citizens travelling on Australian passports. Grave concerns are held for Andrew's safety and well-being by his father, Australian Police, and Australian child protection authorities. Serious concerns are also held for Melinda THOMPSON's emotional well-being. Melinda THOMPSON speaks fluent German and English, and French. Andrew has fair hair and brown eyes. Melinda is blonde with brown eyes. If you see them do not approach Melinda THOMPSON. Contact your nearest police station who will in turn contact Interpol.

Please call you local police, Interpol, or the Australian Federal Police at +61-2-6126-7777 if you have any information about Andrew John THOMPSON.

Web Site: www.foreversearching.com

Recovery Effort E-mail: kenthompson@fastmail.fm

Australia and Vietnam sign information pact on migration

Cooperation with Australia and Vietnam on immigration issues was strengthened today with the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on information-sharing, the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Senator Chris Evans, said. In the first visit to Vietnam by an Australian immigration minister since 2004, Senator Evans and Vietnam's Minister of Public Security, General Le Hong Anh, signed the Exchange of Immigration Information MoU in Hanoi.

Senator Evans said the MoU would build on the already strong relationship between the two countries on immigration matters.

"We will use the memorandum as a framework to develop cooperative activities relating to immigration information issues and to facilitate and encourage greater exchange of immigration information between Vietnam and Australia," Senator Evans said. "This will serve to strengthen Australia's relationship with the



Ministry of Public Security –

Immigration, which is my department's primary Vietnamese counterpart and is responsible for immigration policy and the control of airports in Vietnam."

Australia and Vietnam agreed to work in partnership to establish immigration information analysis units in the Ministry of Public Security – Immigration and the Ministry of Defence – Border Guards.

Senator Evans also proposed the establishment of a working group between senior officials from both countries to generate open discussion of the bilateral relationship and migration-related issues of mutual interest.

"Minister Anh and I discussed the importance of strong migration management in the region to address people smuggling by sea and air, human trafficking and other irregular migration issues," the Minister said.

"Australia's technical cooperation and engagement with Vietnam is already considerable. "Our engagement with Vietnam, particularly through document examination and English language training are highly valued and appreciated by our Vietnamese counterparts."

The minister will inspected a document examination lab in Ho Chi Minh City (January 14) while he attends the opening of an English language training program for Vietnamese Government staff at the Tan Son Nhat airport.

Five Australian-funded document examination labs gifted to the Vietnamese Government have been operating to successfully counter

migration fraud at airports and sea-ports. The newest lab, Da Nang, opened last month. There are two labs in Hanoi and another at Moc Bai near the Cambodian border.

"The laboratories include a specialised video imaging system, microscopes and light sources including ultraviolet and white light," Senator Evans said.

"Working with our regional neighbours is an essential element in managing our border security. My department – the Department of Immigration and Citizenship – has also worked closely with the Vietnamese Government to train document examiners.

"These facilities build on Vietnam's existing document examination capabilities and assist in the fight against identity and document fraud.

"Identity fraud is a global issue and possessing specialist equipment and examination techniques is crucial for enhancing the integrity of international borders in our region."

During the four-day visit, the Senator Evans-led delegation will also meet the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr Pham Gia Khiem, and the Deputy Minister of Defence, Colonel-General Phan Trung Kien.

Senator Evans said business and tourism ties between Australia and Vietnam continued to grow, which made cooperation on migration matters between the two countries essential.

Two-way trade between Australia and Vietnam has grown an average of 20 per cent a year over the past five years, to reach almost \$7 billion in 2007.

In the past three years, the number of short-term business travelers from Vietnam to Australia has more than doubled, with 3395 subclass 456 visas granted in 2005-06, jumping to 8252 grants in 2007-08.

While Vietnam was proving to be a popular destination for Australian tourists, Senator Evans said Australia was also becoming more popular with Vietnamese travelers. There were 7337 visitor visas granted to Vietnamese nationals in 2007-08, almost double the 3726 granted in 2006-07.

The Minister said this latest delegation visit built on his successful regional visits to Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore in August 2008.

Successful auction of state notes

Greece on Tuesday successfully completed an auction of short and medium-term notes, raising 2.550 billion euros from the market, the Public Debt Management Organisation said.

In an announcement, the organisation said that the auction was oversubscribed as bids submitted totaled 13.2 billion euros, sharply up from two billion euros which was the value of the issue. The Greek state raised 1.170 billion euros from the sale of three-month notes, 780 million euros from six-month notes and 600 million euros from 12-month notes. The average weighed interest rate for the three-month note was set at 2.40 pct (from 2.61 pct the Euribor rate), 2.46 pct for the six-month rate (2.67 pct) and 2.67 pct for the 12-month note (2.74 pct the Euribor).

The Greek state also auctioned a 52-week note, worth 500 million euros, with its interest rate set at 2.67 pct. Bids submitted totaled 3.235 billion euros, up 6.47 times the asked sum. The auction was made through the market's primary dealers and settlement date was set Friday, Jan. 16, 2009.