**24 January 2020**

**[FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE]**

**Australian High Commissioner’s remarks at Australia Day 2020**

Honourable Ministers, Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

Tonight I can just abbreviate that to “friends of Australia”.

The year that just passed, 2019, was an extraordinary year in the Malaysia-Australia relationship. According to our calculations, we collaborated on more projects, across more issues, and at a higher level than we ever have before with Malaysia.

The good news is 2020 will be an even bigger year. This is the year of APEC for Malaysia —which means not just a Summit meeting, but a cascade of ministerial engagements throughout the year. It’s the year of ‘Visit Malaysia 2020’ — and I’ve said in the past that it’s my personal aim that we get the number of Australians visiting Malaysia from 400,000 to half a million per year.

It’s the year of the great anniversaries — many of them military — but also it happens to be the 65th anniversary of Australia’s diplomatic presence in Malaysia which we wish to celebrate. And to celebrate that, Australia has designated Malaysia the focus country for 2020. Every year, we choose one country on which to focus our diplomatic and our public affairs attention; and this year it’s Malaysia.

The program is called ‘*Australia now*’ and you will, in the coming weeks and months, be hearing much more about the program; but we’re very excited. But as all of you know, 2020 has not begun very well for Australia. As I speak to you right now, Brisbane and much of Queensland is inundated by floods. There are dust storms in New South Wales. Two days ago, Canberra, my hometown was hit by a historic hailstorm, which was incredibly destructive. And all of that is against the background of these terrible fires.

All of that just in 2020 and we aren’t even at the end of January yet. But here’s the good news; in any national crisis, in any emergency, there are two things that you learn. The first thing is you’re reminded of who your friends are. And it turns out we have a lot of friends in Malaysia. My colleagues and I have been literally overwhelmed with the expressions of sympathy, and encouragement, and the offers of practical assistance. And in fact, there are people in the audience here tonight from agencies in Malaysia who are now working with our Australian counterparts to work out exactly what sort of assistance might be available and how we might take advantage of it.

The other thing you’ll learn in crisis is how resilient you are. And it seems that we Australians are very resilient. Communities have come together in extraordinary ways, which is terrific. The government has announced a $2 billion recovery plan, which is already underway. All this demonstrates what we are capable of.

So from Australia to Malaysia, we are incredibly grateful for everything that’s been said and done and offered from Malaysia. But if I have one message from Australia it’s this: Australia is open for business, and we look forward to having Malaysians visit us again as soon as possible. Essentially, when Malaysians ask me what they can do to help, my answer is do what Malaysians have always done. Continue to send your kids to Australian schools, continue to invest in Australia, continue to trade with Australia, and visit as often as possible.

Thank you very very much.

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