

Statement on Memorandum of Understanding on Combating Crime

November 16, 2011

Minister for Home Affairs and Justice Brendan O'Connor and the United States Ambassador to Australia Jeffrey L. Bleich, on behalf of the Department of Justice and Department of Homeland Security, today signed a Memorandum of Understanding boosting bilateral cooperation in the fight against transnational crime.

Under the MOU, both countries will be able to crosscheck biometric data such as fingerprints associated with the prevention, detection or investigation of a crime punishable by more than one year's imprisonment and, in the event of a match, request further information from the other country on any individual of interest.

These crosschecks would be conducted only in individual cases and will be subject to national laws, so information will not be shared where this is currently not legally permitted by either Australia or the United States.

Both countries have also agreed to search DNA profiles on each other's behalf in individual cases.

The MOU on Enhancing Cooperation in Preventing and Combating Crime recognizes the two countries' shared interests in countering the threat of terrorism and transnational crime, and reaffirms their commitment to close collaboration and the sharing of information necessary to combat these threats.

"Australia and the United States have a long history of close collaboration on law enforcement and border security issues, reflecting our mutual interests in the safe, secure, and efficient movement of people between our two countries," Mr. O'Connor said.

"This important measure reinforces our shared values regarding the protection and privacy of the citizens of both our countries while also denying safe haven to criminals."

"Transnational criminals and terrorists are always trying to hide among legitimate tourists and business travelers," said Ambassador Bleich. "It's critical for us to find them and stop them without interfering with those travelers who build bonds between our people and strengthen commerce for both countries."

"We need sophisticated tools to help our law enforcement and border security officers peel back the cloak of anonymity from criminals and terrorists, so that we can investigate and stop their crimes."

"The MOU expands on the longstanding partnerships between the Australian Attorney-General's Department and Australian Federal Police, and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and Department of Justice," said Ambassador Bleich. "Not only will it enhance our nations' ability to investigate individuals who may pose a threat to our global security, but it will also safeguard the privacy and civil rights of all travellers."