Labor will increase Australia's foreign aid spending every year if it wins the next federal election and is set to pursue official recognition of Palestine.

Foreign policy votes held on the final day of Labor’s national conference in Adelaide on Tuesday will see a Shorten government work to more than double spending on overseas development assistance from its lowest levels in recent Australian history.

A series of backroom negotiations resulted in potentially contentious issues being resolved by party powerbrokers privately, part of efforts to finish the three-day meeting without a major fight on amendments to Labor’s platform.
"It was a desperate political tactic," Penny Wong said of Prime Minister Scott Morrison’s decision to float moving Australia’s embassy in Israel to West Jerusalem. LUKAS COCH

Labor’s factions agreed to plans to introduce increases to bring the foreign aid budget up to 0.5 per cent of gross national income, from the current level of 0.22 per cent.

During the Rudd and Gillard governments, aid spending reached about 0.35 per cent of gross national income, before billions in cuts under the Coalition.

Foreign affairs spokeswoman Penny Wong slammed the Abbott and Turnbull government record on aid and said Prime Minister Scott Morrison had put domestic political concerns before the national interest by floating consideration of moving Australia’s embassy in Israel to West Jerusalem.

"He made a decision to junk long-standing bipartisan foreign policy in a cynical attempt to win votes," Senator Wong said.

"It was a desperate political tactic.

"It was a decision made against the long-standing advice of agencies, without cabinet consideration, and without properly consulting Australia’s partners and allies."
Advocates for foreign aid spending have criticised cuts by the Abbott and Turnbull governments. Andrew Meares

"Astonishingly, it was a decision made without consulting either the Israelis or the Palestinians themselves, whose agreement must be the foundation of any lasting peace."

Foreign policy experts will advise on the eventual move to officially recognise of Palestine, with a future Labor cabinet to have the final say.

After dividing Labor national policy debates for years, agreement from the left and right factions was widely welcomed from delegates in Adelaide.

Mr Morrison last week announced Australia would recognise West Jerusalem as Israel's capital, once a two-state solution with Palestine is agreed.
The Trump administration called the move "a step in the right direction" this week.

"We recognise that a just two-state resolution will require recognising the right of both the Israeli and Palestinian peoples to live in peace and security," Senator Wong told the conference.

Australian Council for International Development policy and advocacy director Bridi Rice called on Labor to release details of its aid policy plans before the election.

"After years of relentless cuts to the aid program, we are delighted that the Labor Party is showing signs of vision and leadership for an Australia where development, defence and diplomacy are equally recognised as foreign policy tools," she said.

"This is the strategic future of development co-operation in the region, not kneejerk reactions to competition with China."

**Long-time aid campaigner Tim Costello**, executive director of Micah Australia, said the increase was badly needed.

"This is a welcomed step in the right direction, and one that the Christian community has been advocating on passionately and persistently this year," he said.
Labor votes to pursue recognition of Palestine, increase foreign aid

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