

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE RT. HON.
R.G. MENZIES, IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ON THURSDAY, 27TH APRIL, 1961

WEST NEW GUINEA

We have had a brief, but most interesting, visit from General Nasution, the Indonesian Minister for National Security and C.G.S. He met Ministers for discussion, while subsequently I had two long talks, at each of which Mr. Townley was present.

In the result, though no new policies were expressed, both General Nasution and I thought that there was a considerable clarification of points of view, and further elucidation of the facts.

The discussions throughout were conducted, as one would expect, in an atmosphere of the utmost good will and of mutual respect. Our two countries are neighbours and friends, with very great interests in common; our interest in peace, in security, in resisting communism. The one matter of difference of opinion relates to West New Guinea. And even there, as I have been able to point out to the General, Australia's interest in New Guinea as an island derives from our desire to see the economic and social progress of its inhabitants, and from our natural interest in the character of its political future. It is an interest which has been emphasised by the significance of New Guinea to us in two wars, and more particularly in the second. It does NOT derive from hostility to Indonesia, for there is no such hostility in Australia.

Having made these general remarks, I think it due to this House and to our distinguished visitor that I should state in summary form and, I hope, with complete fairness, the Indonesian point of view as explained to us, and the Australian point of view as explained by us. I put it in this way, though at all stages it was made clear that, in the dispute or difference between the Netherlands and Indonesia, Australia is neither a party principal nor a self-appointed arbitrator, but is a naturally interested neighbour.

As General Nasution explained it, the Indonesian position is that its claim to West New Guinea is not legal, but political and historical, West New Guinea having been part of the Netherlands East Indies. He claimed that West New Guinea was part of Indonesia before the establishment of the Netherlands East Indies. It is because of this, he said, that Indonesia will not take the matter to the International Court - a procedure which Australia has constantly advocated, and which the Netherlands is willing to adopt.

We dwelt on this matter for some time. I once more made it clear that Australia attached great importance to sovereignty, in a world in which new sovereignties are being created and independent rights maintained. I said that we recognised Dutch sovereignty in West New Guinea (with all that such recognition involved) and that we could not reasonably or successfully be asked to reverse this recognition. If the matter went to the International Court, I said, and the judgment went for Indonesia, we would of course respect that judgment.

General Nasution said that he understood our argument on that point, but added that one consequence of it should be that, in any discussions between the Netherlands and

Indonesia about West New Guinea, Australia should be strictly neutral, and should not support and encourage the Dutch either generally or in the United Nations. This indeed, as he made clear, was the great thing that he wanted to establish with us. I therefore reiterated that, as we had said at the time of Dr. Subandrio's visit, we desired three things -

1. That there should be no recourse to armed force, whether by major or minor operations (e.g. by armed infiltrations) to give effect to Indonesia's territorial claim.
2. That any negotiations between Indonesia and the Netherlands should be voluntary and free of any threat or duress.
3. That any agreement made as a result of negotiations so conducted would be fully respected by Australia.

I went on to explain what we were doing in our section of New Guinea in pursuit of our long-held goal of improvement of living standards, education, and health to a point where the population could freely determine its own future. I will refer to this again, a little later. I said that the Dutch were pursuing broadly similar policies, with the same objective.

The General enquired as to whether Australia did not have some military arrangement with the Netherlands in respect of West New Guinea. I said we had no such arrangement, either directly or indirectly, and that whatever might be rumoured or suggested to the contrary had no foundation. The only agreement related to administrative consultation on common problems and for the forwarding of self-determination in New Guinea. That agreement was published when it was made on November 6, 1957. I recall to Hon. members the principles set out in that agreement as follows :-

1. The Netherlands and Australian Governments base their policies with regard to the territories of New Guinea, for which they are responsible, on the interests and inalienable rights of their inhabitants in conformity with the provisions and the spirit of the United Nations Charter.
2. The territories of Netherlands New Guinea, the Australian Trust Territory of New Guinea, and Papua, are geographically and ethnologically related and future development of their respective populations must benefit from co-operation in policy and administration.
3. The Australian and Netherlands Governments are therefore pursuing, and will continue to pursue, policies directed towards the political, economic, social and educational advancement of the peoples in their territories in a manner which recognizes this ethnological and geographical affinity.
4. At the same time, the two Governments will continue, and strengthen, the co-operation at present existing between their respective administrations in the territories.
5. In so doing the two Governments are determined to promote an uninterrupted development of this process until such time as the inhabitants of the territories concerned will be in a position to determine their own future.

At the same time, I said, not only Australia but other nations could not but be disturbed by any use of force, since even limited hostilities, whether in New Guinea or Laos or elsewhere, could have unforeseen and deplorable consequences. We were therefore glad to have the General's renewed assurances that force would not be used. I will refer to this again, a little later.

I took the opportunity of asking about the infiltrations which were reported to have occurred along the West New Guinea coast. The General replied that there had been some infiltrations, some of those concerned being armed; that such cases were not due to any policy of the Central Government, but arose from some unavoidable lack of control in particular areas; and that there had been some infiltration in reverse from West New Guinea to the eastern islands of Indonesia, inspired, he said, by the Dutch for the purpose of fomenting disaffection in those islands. In answer to a question, he agreed that there was no suggestion that the Dutch were contemplating any form of conquest, but maintained that their actions were a form of subversion.

I have stated without comment these remarks by the General, so that the House may have a balanced picture of our discussions.

To conclude this phase of my report, I should refer to two other aspects of the matter.

As has been frequently pointed out in this House, the native inhabitants of New Guinea have no ethnological association with Indonesia. General Nasution retorts to this that there are several distinct ethnic groups in Indonesia, and yet they are within one political structure, and that Malayan is widely spoken in West New Guinea.

In answer to this we have pointed out that the indigenous inhabitants of the island of New Guinea have more in common, both ethnologically and otherwise, than any of them have with the various races of Indonesia, and that this is a factor which should not be ignored.

But General Nasution adds to this another point. In answer to our emphasis upon ultimate self-determination for both sections of New Guinea he contends that West New Guinea should be (and, as he would say, is) part of Indonesia, and that there is no more reason for conceding self-determination to West New Guinea than to any other racial group or geographical area in Indonesia.

This meant that Indonesia rejected the idea of self-determination for the people of West New Guinea. It was further made clear that the only form of trusteeship acceptable to Indonesia would not be one under the Charter of the United Nations, but would be one for the purpose of transferring West New Guinea to Indonesia after a brief intervening period.

Having regard to this view, I carefully developed our views on self-determination, and now record them for the House.

- (a) In our own New Guinea territories, our policy is, by steady degrees and up to the limits of our financial and administrative capacity, to promote the advancement of the people so that ultimately they will choose for themselves their own constitution and their future relationship with us. We will respect their choice whatever it may be. This, for us, is not a new policy. We have pursued it for years.

It arises from our sense of responsibility, a responsibility which cannot be suddenly or prematurely abandoned if our trusteeship is to be honourably performed.

- (b) Having regard to these undoubted facts, Indonesia cannot reasonably expect Australia to take, nor will Australia take, an initiative in a procedure designed to lead to a handing over of sovereignty and the abandonment of the right of self-determination in the territory concerned. That was, and is, the reason why Australia is most definitely not prepared to put pressure on the Netherlands to negotiate for the transfer of sovereignty and the abandonment of self-determination.

In other words, we recognise Dutch sovereignty, we deal with the Netherlands as a sovereign power, and we approve of the policy of ultimate self-determination which has been adopted by the Netherlands in relation to West New Guinea. If this is regarded by Indonesia as partisanship, we point out that it favours the recognition of sovereignty and the objective of self-determination, to both of which Australia is inevitably attached.

- (c) But on such matters the Netherlands, as the sovereign power, will make, quite freely, its own decisions. Those decisions will be recognised and respected by us.
- (d) We are on most friendly terms with the Dutch, as, remembering the last war, we ought to be. We are also close to and friendly with Indonesia. What Australia has done in the United Nations when the West New Guinea item has come up there, is to support sovereignty and domestic jurisdiction. Sovereignty is basic for Australia not less than to others, including Indonesia. None of this is hostile to Indonesia, and it ought not to be thought so,

Before I conclude, I return to the matter of military involvement. I repeat, in the most categorical terms, that Australia has no military commitment with the Netherlands in relation to West New Guinea, direct or indirect. But armed conflict in that country, whether arising from mass invasion or limited guerilla episodes created by armed infiltration, would present Australia, in common with other countries, with a grave problem. Any such conflict could certainly not be ignored by the United Nations. It would engage the attention, helpful or otherwise, of the great powers. It would threaten world peace, and could well bring disaster to South-East Asia by its encouragement of Communist activity and intervention.

It is therefore necessary to make our position quite clear. We stand for peaceful negotiation at all times, provided that such negotiation is conducted without the threat of force of any shape or kind.

I have stated our recognition of Dutch sovereignty, and our approval of the Dutch policy of self-determination. We have entered into no military commitment beyond those involved in the Charter of the United Nations. But if military conflicts, great or small, arose out of these differences, new and grave problems would arise for many nations, including our own. It is for this reason that the renewed assurances of peaceful pursuit of Indonesia's claims, made by General Nasution, are of such profound importance and international value.

Before I conclude this section of my statement, I would like to say that we were all impressed by General Nasution's frankness and personality. I am sure that he and his wife

enjoyed their visit to Australia. Every opportunity was given to the General by the press, broadcasting and television stations, to express his views. I know that he appreciated this, as we do. He has left Australia after faithfully and ably representing his own country, with, I am certain, a confidence in his own mind that, while his visit may not have changed our policies, it has certainly made a powerful contribution to our common understanding and good will.

LACS

Since I last spoke to the House on Tuesday, 11th April, new and important developments in the continuing crisis in Laos have occurred.

In Moscow, negotiations have at last resulted in a measure of agreement between the Soviet and the United Kingdom Governments as Co-Chairmen of the Geneva Conference of 1954 which settled the Indo-China conflict.

The United Kingdom Government has acted throughout these negotiations in close consultation with its friends. We hope and believe that the Soviet Government did likewise, for the value of the new agreement will depend largely on its being respected by other members of the Communist Bloc.

The arrangements agreed upon are, in brief, that -

- (a) the Co-Chairmen should call for a cease-fire in Laos which should be arranged by the Laotian combatants themselves. This call was issued on 24th April;
- (b) the Indian Government, as Chairman of the International Control Commission for Laos, was invited to reconvene that Commission in New Delhi. The Commission is to report to the Co-Chairmen and to receive instructions from them on the Commission's functions in controlling the cease-fire. (The Indian High Commissioner in Australia, Mr. Sen, has been chosen by his Government to represent it as Chairman on this Commission. We welcome this, for Mr. Sen has a close knowledge of Laos, and a wide understanding of the problems involved.)
- (c) an international conference on Laos should be convened in Geneva on 12th May.

Invitations have already been issued for the proposed international conference which will be attended by 14 nations.

These will comprise -

The nine nations who met in Geneva in 1954 - (U.S.S.R., Communist China, United Kingdom, United States, France, Laos, Cambodia and North and South Vietnam).

The three-nation members of the International Control Commission (India, Canada and Poland).

The other two nations who border on Laos (Thailand and Burma).

(Pending the establishment of a Government of Laos which is accepted by both sides, it will be for the conference to determine how Laos should be represented at the conference.)

I make the following observations.

First, no explicit condition has been recorded by the Co-Chairmen that the cease-fire must take place prior to the convening of the international conference. Arrangements for the negotiation of a cease-fire are placed in effect in the hands of the various Laotian elements. I believe that the representatives of the Laotian Government, headed by Prince Boun Oum - which I should add is regarded as the constitutional government of Laos by the Australian Government as well as by the Governments of the United Kingdom, United States and other countries - will co-operate actively in making the necessary practical arrangements for an immediate cease-fire. We can only hope that other Laotian elements will adopt a similar attitude.

Both the United States and United Kingdom Governments have made it clear that they will not be prepared to attend the proposed international conference until they are satisfied that a cease-fire has in fact occurred in Laos. The point has great importance. It is out of the question to confer on ways and means of ensuring the future independence and neutrality of Laos - a policy of non-interference by Western powers and Communist powers alike - if fighting is continuing in Laos and new military threats are added to the recent series of offensive operations by the Pathet Lao. Those operations have won important and increasingly dangerous gains for the insurgents. They have been supported by the Soviet air lift of arms into Laos and by overland transport of supplies from Communist North Vietnam as well as by some military personnel from North Vietnam. Both Luang Prabang and Vientiane - the two capitals - are now threatened by these offensive operations. The most important of them occurred simultaneously with the final stages of the recent negotiations in Moscow.

Second, the Australian Government has long been determined to support genuine negotiations of a peaceful solution of the Laotian problem. At the same time we have made it clear by our recent association with the S.E.A.T.O. communique of 29th March, that we are united with our Allies also in our determination to prevent armed Communist domination of Laos. This being clear, there is now a better prospect of coming to an agreement, by negotiation, on a solution which will satisfy all legitimate interests and avoid war. The common ground is the desire of the Laotian people, the Western and neutral powers and (as we hope) the Communist powers, that Laos should be a genuinely neutral State under a national government representing all responsible opinion.

Third, the problem of Laos has not been solved. It is an economically weak State, lacking social and political cohesion. It will always be exposed to pressures, open and clandestine, from its Communist neighbours. It will be the task of the conference to try to devise ways of relieving it from this pressure. The security of South-East Asia depends on Laos being neutral and free from Communist or any other domination. The next three or four weeks will reveal how much co-operation we can expect from the Communist powers in these efforts to establish by peaceful negotiation the framework for Laotian security, independence and neutrality.

SIERRA LEONE

I draw the attention of the House to the fact that Sierra Leone, one of the oldest British territories in West Africa, will attain its formal independence today, 27th April. Sierra Leone last year declared its intention of applying for membership of the Commonwealth and at the Prime Ministers' Conference last month, we welcomed its entry, subject to the usual constitutional processes. These processes are now complete and I have received a message from Sir Milton Margai, Prime Minister of Sierra Leone expressing appreciation for the acceptance of Sierra Leone as a full member of the Commonwealth.

Australia is represented at the independence celebrations in Freetown this week, at which H.R.H. the Duke of Kent is representing Her Majesty. Lord Casey, who, as Minister for External Affairs, had so much to do with developing our relations with newly independent countries in Asia and Africa, kindly agreed to attend on our behalf. He is accompanied by Mr. D.O. Hay, our High Commissioner designate to Canada, who is on his way to his new posting.

Sierra Leone is not a large country, but by no means an unimportant one. The course of its constitutional development towards independence has been smooth and peaceful, in full agreement and co-operation with the United Kingdom. It will be a valuable addition to the Commonwealth group in West Africa. In the past, Australia has had little contact with Sierra Leone, but we look forward to the development of close and friendly relations within the brotherhood of the Commonwealth, and will be glad to offer the new nation any assistance within our capacity.

I feel sure that all Honourable members will join me in extending a warm welcome to our newest Commonwealth member and in expressing our sincere good wishes for the future welfare and prosperity of Sierra Leone and its people.
