

WEST NEW GUINEA

Statement by the Prime Minister, the Pt. Hon. R.G. Menzies

1. The Cabinet has devoted a long time to a review of the more recent developments affecting Indonesia and West New Guinea. It was greatly assisted by a full factual review submitted by the Minister for External Affairs. The President of Indonesia has not only repeated his nation's claims to the sovereignty of West New Guinea, but has made statements of intention to assert those claims by force of arms unless the Netherlands gives ground.
2. We are not a party principal to this dispute, but we have a lively interest in its settlement. As good friends and neighbours of the Dutch, and good friends and neighbours of the Indonesians, our great desire is for a peaceful settlement, not one compelled by threat or duress.
3. Looking at the matter in a world setting, we point out that the Charter of the United Nations requires the peaceful settlement of international disputes, and imposes obligations upon member nations to refrain from the threat or use of arms for the enforcement of territorial claims.
4. Australia, as a loyal member of the United Nations and as a nation vitally concerned with the preservation of peace in South-East Asia and the South-West Pacific, believes that it is essential for civilisation that all nations should settle any differences by negotiation and not by force or the threat of force.
5. In the matter of West New Guinea, we have repeatedly made it clear that should the Netherlands and Indonesia come to an agreement, without force or duress, we would respect that agreement; and that we were and are deeply attached to the attainment by under-developed peoples, after adequate and helpful preparation, of the right to choose their own future. We ourselves have for many years followed and will, of course, continue to follow these ideas in the Australian territory of Papua and the Australian Trust Territory of New Guinea.
6. Our support of these ideas is not based upon hostility to any other nation, for we wish to live at peace with all. In our own case, we apply them out of a humane desire to raise the standards of living and of government among people for whom we feel a great moral responsibility.
7. We were on more than one occasion pleased to receive and to accept from the Government of Indonesia explicit assurances that arms would not be employed to enforce territorial claims to West New Guinea, and that Indonesia did not and would not make any claim to that portion of Papua and New Guinea for which we have direct responsibility. We feel that we are entitled to rely upon the performance of those assurances, to which we have attached and still attach the greatest importance.
8. We are reluctant to believe that the threats of war now being made by the Indonesian Government, in breach of these assurances, are to be followed by action. War in this corner of the world is quite unnecessary, for the doors to free negotiation are wide open. Such a war would solve no problems, but would create animosities from which nobody except the Communist powers could profit. The paramount interests of the people of New Guinea, both West and East, and indeed of South-East Asia generally, cannot be served but must be damaged by war.

9. This is not a time for either bellicose or extravagant comments. The Government of Australia simply says that it recognises and will discharge its prime responsibility for the security of Australia, its territories and its people. Having regard not only to our treaty rights and responsibilities but also to the hard facts of international life, we act in close consultation with the great free powers, particularly Great Britain and the United States of America. No responsible Australian would wish to see any action affecting the safety of Australia on the issues of war or peace in this area except in concert with our great and powerful friends.

10. It is for this reason that we are in constant contact with London and Washington and the United Nations Headquarters, steadfastly maintaining the basic principle that the peaceful settlement of disputes is the central theme and the supreme mission of the United Nations and indeed of any civilised order in the world, and that we are therefore deeply anxious that the West New Guinea problem should be resolved by negotiation, not under threat, but with a desire to do the best for the human beings who make up the population of the disputed territory.

11. We are constantly exploring with our principal allies the possibilities of securing United Nations activities in bringing about free negotiation and a peaceful settlement.

CANBERRA,

12th January, 1962.