



DEPARTMENT OF
FOREIGN
AFFAIRS

NO
M/144

DATE
13 October 1973

FIGHTING IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Whitlam, referring to his statement of 7 October on the renewed outbreak of fighting in the Middle East, said today that the Australian Government was deeply concerned at the continuation and extension of the conflict since that date.

Mr. Whitlam said it was particularly regrettable that innocent civilians had become victims of the fighting. The conflict, he said, not only meant tragic loss of life for the countries directly involved, but also had far-reaching implications for international peace and security.

In this situation, the Australian Government continued to believe that a ceasefire should be put into effect at the earliest possible moment, so that a renewed international effort could be launched to resolve the long-standing problems which lay behind the repeated outbreaks of hostilities in the Middle East.

Mr. Whitlam stressed the key role which the United Nations had to play in bringing about a ceasefire and in subsequent moves to find a lasting settlement in the Middle East. The Security Council, as the United Nations organ charged with primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, should be the major centre of this activity.

The Council had already met but had so far been unable to find a basis of agreement to permit a call for an immediate ceasefire.

The Council members were, however, maintaining continuous urgent consultations in an endeavour to reach agreement, and Mr. Whitlam was pleased that the Australian Representative, Sir Laurence McIntyre, as President of the Council for October, was playing a key role in these consultations.

Mr. Whitlam said it was vital that these consultations should succeed and that the Council should be able to discharge its crucial responsibilities to restore peace to the Middle East. He urged all parties to the conflict and all members of the Security Council and of the United Nations, to give their wholehearted support to these efforts.

Mr. Whitlam said he fully endorsed the statement issued by the Secretary-General of the United Nations on 11 October, in which the Secretary-General appealed to all countries involved in hostilities to turn the tragic conflict into a starting point for a new effort at a real settlement.

Mr. Whitlam said that Australia itself would continue to follow its neutral and even-handed policy in the Middle East. Referring to some overseas reports about his reply in Parliament on 10 October to a question about Australian nationals volunteering to fight in the Middle East conflict, he reiterated that holders of Australian passports were free to travel to whichever countries they wished to visit.

This policy, he said, did not in any way imply approval or encouragement of Australian citizens volunteering for military service in the forces of any foreign country.