

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR. E.G. WHITLAM, Q.C., M.P., AT
THE OPENING OF THE SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL, "OZANAM" HOME OF
PEACE AND CONTENTMENT, CAMPBELL, A.C.T. 14 FEBRUARY 1974

I AM ESPECIALLY PLEASED ON THE DAY AFTER MY RETURN FROM SOUTH-EAST ASIA TO BE ASSOCIATED WITH THE LAUNCHING OF A NEW ENTERPRISE OF THE ST. VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY. FOR AMONG THE VERY WIDE RANGE OF ITS ACTIVITIES, THE SOCIETY HAS INCLUDED TRAINING PROGRAMS AND MATERIAL ASSISTANCE IN SOUTH-EAST ASIA. UNDOUBTEDLY, SINCE ITS FOUNDATION BY A GROUP OF STUDENTS 141 YEARS AGO, THE SOCIETY HAS CARRIED ITS WORK AMONG THE POOR INTO AS MANY AREAS AS POSSIBLE. THE SOCIETY'S WORK AMONG THE HOMELESS, THE YOUNG, THE HANDICAPPED AND THE DISADVANTAGED, BOTH IN AUSTRALIA AND OVERSEAS, TESTIFIES TO THE VIGOUR WITH WHICH THE PRINCIPLES SET BY FREDERICK OZANAM - ONE OF THE GREAT CATHOLICS OF THE LAST 200 YEARS - ARE BEING PURSUED.

THE NAME YOU HAVE CHOSEN FOR YOUR LATEST ENTERPRISE, A NEW AGED PERSONS HOSTEL, IS THEREFORE PARTICULARLY APPROPRIATE. AND YOUR POLICY OF ADMITTING AGED PEOPLE INTO THIS HOME ON THE BASIS OF NEED IS IN LINE WITH THE HIGHEST IDEALS OF THE FOUNDER OF THE SOCIETY. THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT IS HAPPY TO HAVE BEEN ASSOCIATED WITH THIS ENDEAVOUR. CLEARLY THE \$297,000 WHICH THE GOVERNMENT HAS PROVIDED UNDER THE AGED PERSONS HOSTELS ACT HAS BEEN WELL DIRECTED.

ANOTHER SOURCE OF PLEASURE FOR ME IS TO SEE THAT, IN ESTABLISHING THIS HOSTEL, THE SOCIETY HAS SHOWN A FULL AWARENESS FOR A MODERN APPROACH TO HOUSING FOR THE AGED. THE BREAKDOWN OF THE TRADITIONAL THREE-GENERATION FAMILY UNIT THROUGHOUT THE WESTERN WORLD AND ITS REPLACEMENT BY THE SO-CALLED "NUCLEAR FAMILY"

HAS CREATED AN ENORMOUS PROBLEM WITH THE CARE OF THE AGED. FOR TOO LONG THE PROBLEM WAS DEALT WITH BY PROVIDING ONLY ONE CHOICE - THE NURSING HOME - FOR AGED PEOPLE WHO DID NOT HAVE THEIR OWN HOME OR WHO COULD NO LONGER LIVE THERE. THIS FORCED MANY AGED PEOPLE INTO A STYLE OF ACCOMMODATION WHICH WAS NOT APPROPRIATE TO THEIR NEEDS. MANY OLD PEOPLE WHO WERE FIT AND WILLING TO PARTICIPATE ACTIVELY IN THE SOCIETY AROUND THEM HAD TO LIVE IN INSTITUTIONS WHICH WERE INTENDED FOR PEOPLE WHO WERE LESS PHYSICALLY AND MENTALLY CAPABLE.

ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE CARE OF THE AGED IN RECENT YEARS HAS BEEN THE GROWING EMPHASIS ON PROVIDING OTHER CHOICES FOR ELDERLY PEOPLE. THE GOVERNMENT ACTIVELY SUPPORTS AN APPROACH BASED ON HAVING THREE TYPES OF ACCOMMODATION PROVIDED FOR ELDERLY PEOPLE WHO NO LONGER CAN STAY AT HOME. WE WANT TO SEE THESE PEOPLE BE ABLE TO CHOOSE BETWEEN SELF-CONTAINED UNITS, HOSTEL-TYPE HOMES AND, ONLY WHERE THIS IS MEDICALLY NECESSARY, NURSING HOMES. THE CREATION OF HOSTEL-TYPE ACCOMMODATION HERE IN CAMPBELL BY THE ST. VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY FULLY ACCORDS WITH THIS THREE-TIERED APPROACH.

MUCH REMAINS TO BE DONE IN THIS AREA. EVEN NOW IT HAS BEEN ESTIMATED THAT ABOUT 25 PER CENT OF PEOPLE CURRENTLY IN NURSING HOMES SHOULD NOT BE THERE. WE MUST EXPLORE QUICKLY AND VIGOROUSLY ALL POSSIBLE MEANS OF PROVIDING OTHER CHOICES FOR THE AGED. THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT IN THE LAST YEAR HAS TAKEN SEVERAL IMPORTANT STEPS TO REVIEW AND REVISE THE APPROACH TO AGED PERSONS HOUSING. THE NEWLY ESTABLISHED SOCIAL WELFARE COMMISSION APPOINTED A COMMITTEE TO INQUIRE INTO AGED PERSONS

HOUSING IN JUNE 1973 AND IT GAVE AN INTERIM REPORT TO THE MINISTER FOR SOCIAL SECURITY AT THE END OF NOVEMBER. IN KEEPING WITH THE GOVERNMENT'S POLICY OF MAKING DOCUMENTS OF THIS KIND PUBLIC, THE INTERIM REPORT WAS PROMPTLY TABLED IN FEDERAL PARLIAMENT. IT MADE A NUMBER OF IMPORTANT RECOMMENDATIONS, PARTICULARLY RELATING TO GOVERNMENT SUBSIDIES. I EXPECT THAT CABINET WILL CONSIDER THE REPORT AND MAKE A DECISION ON THESE RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE NEXT FEW WEEKS. MEANWHILE THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE OF INQUIRY WILL CONTINUE AND I WOULD DRAW SPECIAL ATTENTION TO THE FACT THAT ONE OF ITS TERMS OF REFERENCE IS TO INQUIRE INTO "THE NEED FOR THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT TO INTRODUCE ANY ALTERNATIVE OR ADDITIONAL GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS OF ASSISTANCE FOR THE HOUSING AND CARE OF THE AGED".

IN ADDITION TO THIS COMMITTEE OF INQUIRY, THE MINISTER FOR SOCIAL SECURITY, MR HAYDEN, EARLY LAST YEAR ASKED A STANDING COMMITTEE OF THE NATIONAL HEALTH AND MEDICAL RESEARCH COUNCIL TO INQUIRE INTO AND REPORT ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF GERIATRIC CARE GENERALLY IN AUSTRALIA. THE COMMITTEE HAS BEEN MEETING REGULARLY UNDER THE CHAIRMANSHIP OF DR DAVID DE SOUZA, AN EXPERT IN THE FIELD OF GERIATRIC CARE. THE COMMITTEE IS EXPECTED TO REPORT TO MR HAYDEN VERY SOON. ON ANOTHER FRONT, THE MINISTER FOR HOUSING, MR JOHNSON, HAS ASKED THE STATISTICIAN TO CONDUCT A NATION-WIDE SURVEY OF AGED PERSONS' HOUSING NEEDS. IN ASKING FOR THE SURVEY MR JOHNSON DECLARED THAT THE STUDY WAS NECESSARY IF EFFECTIVE ACTION WAS TO BE TAKEN TO SOLVE THE GRAVE HOUSING PROBLEMS NOW CONFRONTING MANY AGED PERSONS, ESPECIALLY PENSIONERS. THE SURVEY IS SCHEDULED TO BEGIN IN DECEMBER THIS YEAR.

THESE INVESTIGATIONS ARE NEEDED TO ENSURE THAT COMMUNITY ACTIVITY IN THIS AREA IS APPROPRIATE TO THE NEEDS OF OUR SENIOR CITIZENS. THE GOVERNMENT, HOWEVER, HAS NOT BEEN CONTENT TO DO NOTHING FRESH WHILE IT AWAITS THE RESULTS OF THE STUDIES. IT HAS TAKEN ACTION TO MAKE MORE MONEY AVAILABLE FOR AGED PERSONS HOUSING AND FOR DOMICILIARY CARE FOR THE AGED. IN MARCH LAST YEAR IT ANNOUNCED THAT PEOPLE CARING FOR SICK AGED RELATIVES IN NEED OF NURSING CARE IN THEIR OWN HOMES WOULD BECOME ELIGIBLE FOR A \$14 A WEEK GOVERNMENT GRANT. IT HAS ENACTED AN AGED PERSONS HOMES BILL WHICH INCREASED FROM \$10 TO \$12 A WEEK THE RATE OF SUBSIDY PAID TO ELIGIBLE ORGANISATIONS WHICH PROVIDE PERSONAL CARE SERVICES FOR THE AGED IN HOSTEL ACCOMMODATION.

TWO OTHER GOVERNMENT ACTIONS LAST YEAR WERE DIRECTED TO THE NEED FOR IMPROVING HOME CARE FACILITIES FOR THE AGED. THE DELIVERED MEALS SUBSIDY BILL WAS ENACTED TO INCREASE THE BASIC RATE OF SUBSIDY PAID TO "MEALS-ON-WHEELS" SERVICES FROM 15 CENTS TO 20 CENTS PER MEAL. THEN THE STATES GRANTS (HOME CARE) BILL WAS BROUGHT IN TO INFUSE EXTRA FUNDS INTO THE PRESENT HOME CARE PROGRAM. THE BILL INCREASED THE GOVERNMENT'S GRANTS TO THE STATES FROM A DOLLAR FOR DOLLAR BASIS TO \$2 FOR EVERY \$1 SPENT BY THE STATES ON HOUSEKEEPER AND HOME HEALTH SERVICES AND SENIOR CITIZEN CENTRES. IT ALSO INCREASED THE SUBSIDY FOR WELFARE OFFICERS EMPLOYED FOR SENIOR CITIZEN CENTRES FROM HALF TO TWO-THIRDS OF THEIR SALARY.

THE GOVERNMENT'S AIM WITH ALL OF THESE ACTIONS IS TO ENSURE THAT ALL AGED PEOPLE THROUGHOUT AUSTRALIA CAN LIVE IN COMFORT AND DIGNITY AND THAT ALL AGED PEOPLE CAN SPEND THEIR TIME IN AN INTERESTING AND STIMULATING ENVIRONMENT.

TO ACHIEVE THIS AIM WE MUST ENSURE THAT WE ALLOW FOR THE UTMOST FLEXIBILITY IN THE CARE OF THE AGED. WE BELIEVE THAT, IF AT ALL POSSIBLE, AGED PEOPLE SHOULD BE ABLE TO LIVE IN THEIR OWN HOMES AND MUCH OF OUR ACTIVITY WILL BE DIRECTED TOWARDS THIS END. WE HOPE THAT THE AUSTRALIAN ASSISTANCE PLAN WILL PROVIDE A FRAMEWORK FOR THIS. THE PLAN, WHICH AIMS TO ASSIST IN THE DEVELOPMENT AT A REGIONAL LEVEL OF NATIONALLY CO-ORDINATED WELFARE ACTIVITY, WILL PROVIDE FOR COST SHARING WITH LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND VOLUNTARY AGENCIES OVER A WIDE RANGE OF WELFARE SERVICES. WE HOPE THAT THE PLAN WILL ENABLE GREATER ATTENTION TO BE PAID TO HOME VISITING AND OTHER DOMICILIARY CARE SO THAT ELDERLY PEOPLE CAN REMAIN IN THEIR OWN HOMES FOR AS LONG AS POSSIBLE. THE GOVERNMENT IS ALSO EXAMINING THE POSSIBILITY OF ESTABLISHING DAY CARE CENTRES TO WHICH AGED PEOPLE WOULD GO FOR MEDICAL TREATMENT AND SERVICES, SUCH AS CHIROPODY, WHILE LIVING AT HOME. THIS CONCEPT HAS THE ADDITIONAL ADVANTAGE THAT IT WOULD OFFER THE POSSIBILITY OF REGULAR AND WIDE-RANGING SOCIAL CONTACT FOR ELDERLY PEOPLE.

WHETHER THE AGED LIVE AT HOME OR IN HOSTELS OR IN NURSING HOMES, IT IS BECOMING INCREASINGLY OBVIOUS THAT WE MUST DO ALL THAT WE CAN TO PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR THEM TO REMAIN INVOLVED IN THE COMMUNITY AROUND THEM. THIS NEED IS FREQUENTLY OVERLOOKED AND A KIND OF GERIATRIC APARTHEID HAS RESULTED. THE GOVERNMENT BELIEVES THAT WE MUST EXPLORE ALL POSSIBILITIES FOR WIDE-RANGING SOCIAL CONTACT AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT FOR THE AGED. AS AN EXAMPLE, MR HAYDEN HAS ASKED THE SOCIAL WELFARE COMMISSION TO LOOK AT THE POSSIBILITY OF SENIOR CITIZEN CENTRES BEING USED AS A BASIS FOR DAY CARE SERVICES. THIS WOULD ENABLE AGED PEOPLE TO LOOK AFTER CHILDREN WITH WHOM THEY COULD DEVELOP A CLOSE RELATIONSHIP.

I AM SURE THAT THE SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL SHARES ALL OF THESE AIMS AND IDEALS. THROUGHOUT ITS HISTORY IT HAS EMPHASISED THE NEED FOR PERSONAL CONTACT BETWEEN ITS WORKERS AND THE PEOPLE WITH WHOM THEY ARE INVOLVED.

AGED PERSONS HOUSING AND DOMICILIARY CARE WILL NOT, OF COURSE, BY THEMSELVES SATISFY OUR AIM OF ENSURING A COMFORTABLE AND DIGNIFIED LIFE FOR THE AGED. THE GOVERNMENT IS COMMITTED TO IMPROVING THE LOT OF ELDERLY PEOPLE IN OTHER WAYS, PARTICULARLY IN FINANCIAL TERMS. ON THE SECOND DAY OF THE FIRST SITTING OF THE NEWLY ELECTED PARLIAMENT LAST YEAR A BILL WAS INTRODUCED TO INCREASE PENSIONS BY \$1.50 A WEEK. PAYMENT OF THE PENSION INCREASE WAS MADE RETROSPECTIVE TO THE FIRST PAY DAY AFTER THE 1972 ELECTIONS. THE BUDGET PROVIDED FOR A FURTHER INCREASE OF \$1.50 A WEEK IN PENSIONS IN THE SPRING. THESE TWO INCREASES HAVE MEANT THAT WITHIN A YEAR PENSIONS HAVE RISEN BY 15 PER CENT, WHICH HAS ALLOWED THEM TO KEEP AHEAD OF INFLATION.

WE HAVE CONSTANTLY RE-AFFIRMED OUR INTENTION TO LIFT PENSIONS TO 25 PER CENT OF AVERAGE WEEKLY MALE EARNINGS. IN KEEPING WITH THIS AIM WE HAVE ALSO REPEATED OUR PLEDGE TO INCREASE PENSIONS EACH SPRING AND AUTUMN UNTIL THIS LEVEL IS REACHED.

IN ADDITION TO THESE INCREASES, THE GOVERNMENT IS MOVING TOWARDS THE ABOLITION OF THE MEANS TEST ON AGE PENSIONS. THE FIRST STEP TOWARDS THIS OBJECTIVE WAS TAKEN IN THE BUDGET WITH THE ABOLITION OF THE MEANS TEST FOR ALL PEOPLE AGED 75 OR MORE. ANOTHER STEP WILL BE TAKEN IN THIS YEAR'S BUDGET.

IN THIS CONTEXT OF LIBERALISATION I WOULD ALSO MENTION A MEASURE OF PARTICULAR SIGNIFICANCE TO ELDERLY CITIZENS WHO HAVE COME TO AUSTRALIA FROM OTHER COUNTRIES. THE NATIONAL PARLIAMENT ENACTED LAST YEAR A BILL WHICH MAKES AVAILABLE AGE AND SOME OTHER PENSIONS TO AUSTRALIAN PENSIONERS WHO WISH TO LIVE IN ANY OTHER COUNTRY. NO LONGER WILL AN AGED PERSON WHO HAS WORKED HARD IN AUSTRALIA LOSE THE SOCIAL SERVICE FRUITS OF HIS LABOUR SIMPLY BECAUSE HE WANTS TO SPEND HIS LAST YEARS IN HIS COUNTRY OF ORIGIN.

IN ALL THAT IT IS DOING, THE GOVERNMENT AIMS TO OVERCOME THE DISADVANTAGES AND INEQUALITIES THAT TOO MANY AGED PEOPLE HAVE SUFFERED IN THE PAST IN AUSTRALIA. WE BELIEVE THAT WITH PROPER PLANNING AND ADEQUATE SPENDING WE CAN ERADICATE THE WORST OF THE INEQUALITIES THAT AT PRESENT EXIST. WE BELIEVE THAT, BY CO-OPERATING WITH VOLUNTARY AGENCIES SUCH AS THE SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL, WE CAN ENABLE AGED PEOPLE TO HAVE THE DIGNITY AND COMFORT WHICH IS THEIR RIGHT.

WE APPLAUD ALL THAT YOUR SOCIETY HAS ACHIEVED IN THE PAST AND WE KNOW WE CAN COUNT ON YOUR CO-OPERATION IN THE FUTURE,
