



## PRIME MINISTER

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### BALTIC STATES 60TH ANNIVERSARY RECEPTION, CANBERRA

I welcome this opportunity to join with you in celebrating the 60th Anniversary of the Declaration of Independence of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania. This is a most important occasion for the Australian Baltic community.

Sixty years ago, the leaders of these three nations proclaimed a Declaration of Independence which restored a sovereignty that they had enjoyed in earlier times. Unfortunately, this independence was to be short-lived.

It was one of the first steps taken by my Government on coming to office in December 1975 to withdraw de jure recognition of the incorporation of the Baltic states into the USSR.

The tragic events which put an end to the independence which you are tonight celebrating and which have occurred since that time have led tens of thousands of Latvians, Estonians and Lithuanians to seek freedom in other countries.

You have made Australia your new homeland. Australia has offered new hope to many who have fled oppressive authoritarian regimes -- new freedom to achieve and create, new opportunity to retain and nourish distinct cultural religious and ethnic traditions.

Your communities have seized this opportunity, and it is to your great credit that you have succeeded in maintaining your identity, preserving your languages and cultures.

Australia is not a country whose culture and traditions are drawn from one source alone. We are a multicultural society, and we are all the richer for it.

You are not a large community in Australia, yet you have contributed to all fields of endeavour out of all proportion to your numbers. Sir Arvi Parbo, a leader in our business community; John and Ilsa Konrads, olympic champions both; Eddie Palubinkas, the record breaking basketballer of the Montreal Olympics; Tom Raudonikis, former captain of the Australian Rugby League Team; Olegas Truchanas, famous naturalist and photographer; and many others, all have distinguished themselves in the community.

It is the Government's aim to encourage the increasing contribution of ethnic communities to every aspect of Australian life -- academic, cultural, professional, business and sport.

To this end, we are working actively to improve Government services to all our ethnic communities, particularly to migrants who have recently arrived and who have not acquired a command of English.

We also aim to expand the ethnic broadcasting service, and establish an ethnic television service.

We recognise that the success of the Government's ethnic affairs policies depends very much upon the cooperation of the ethnic communities themselves.

I commend the Baltic Council of Australia for bringing together the members of three communities which, whilst sharing many common ideals and attributes, have very individual cultures and identities.

I look to you to play a most active role in helping with the Government to improve community services available to migrants in need of assistance and in helping to make our country a great country to live for all Australians.

Ladies and gentlemen, will you join with me in a toast to Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania.

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