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PRIME MINISTER

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RHODESIA

The Australian Government warmly welcomes the announcement from London that final agreement had been reached between the parties at the Constitutional Conference on all aspects of a Rhodesian settlement.

The leaders in the talks - Lord Carrington, Bishop Muzorewa, Mr. Nkomo and Mr. Mugabe - are to be congratulated for their outstanding dedication to the task of reaching agreement. In the four successive phases of discussion - on an independence constitution, on transitional arrangements, on ceasefire arrangements, and on implementation procedures - all the parties had shown a willingness to compromise, to move away from entrenched positions, and to continue negotiating even when at times it seemed that the conference could go no further.

The agreement is a magnificent achievement of historic importance. It opens the way for a just and democratic solution to the political problems that have for many years bedevilled Rhodesia. It means an end to the war that has brought suffering, death and economic hardship to many thousands of people of all races in Rhodesia and the surrounding countries.

The London agreement means in essence that all the parties who have been engaged in the Rhodesian conflict have now agreed to put their faith in democratic elections, to be conducted under the authority of a British Governor, in order to determine Rhodesia's future Government. The British Government resumes its authority over Rhodesia for the transitional period leading up to the elections. Following signature on 19 December of the settlement reached at Lancaster House, the ceasefire will come into effect on 27 December. The elections will be held about 2 months later.

Australia has contributed significantly to the reaching of this settlement and will be taking part in its implementation.

With signature of an all-parties settlement and British authority re-established in Rhodesia, the Australian Government can be satisfied that the objectives for which sanctions were imposed have been achieved. The Australian Government will therefore now take the necessary steps to remove sanctions against Rhodesia.

The Government recognises that a number of countries may wish to await the formal lifting of sanctions by the United Nations Security Council. But for Australia, as a country that has played an active part in contributing to the present outcome, the Government believes it is appropriate to remove sanctions immediately following the signature of an all-parties agreement on Wednesday.

This will mean that, among other things, travel between Rhodesia and Australia will be unrestricted. Trade and other forms of contact will be similarly unrestricted.

Britain, the United States and some other countries are also lifting sanctions against Rhodesia. The Australian Government hopes that all other nations now welcome Rhodesia back into the world community by the lifting of sanctions and the encouragement of the Government that will emerge as a result of the forthcoming elections there.

The London Conference had its genesis in the recent Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Lusaka. At that meeting, under the chairmanship of President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia, Commonwealth leaders addressed the Rhodesian problem as a matter of priority concern. Australia was one of the small contact group of six countries that drafted a set of principles on which a negotiated solution could be based.

These principles were adopted by the Lusaka meeting. They were intended to provide a framework for early efforts by Britain and the other interested parties to reach agreement at the conference table, and to establish a political climate of support for movement away from entrenched adversary positions.

The Lusaka principles proved their worth in a long and difficult negotiating process in London. The continued interest and moral support of Commonwealth countries, and their strong desire that the talks should not be allowed to fail, was a significant and helpful factor.

Australia will be contributing to the implementation of the agreed settlement in two ways.

First, Australia will provide a contingent of around 150 men to a ceasefire monitoring force, along with contingents from Britain, Fiji, Kenya and New Zealand. Britain's willingness to mount such a force, and Commonwealth countries' willingness to contribute, became an essential element in reaching agreement in London. The function of the monitoring force will be to observe and report on the effectiveness of the ceasefire. In no circumstances will it be called upon to enforce the ceasefire, to intervene or mediate between opposing forces, or to exercise law-and-order functions in Rhodesia. The role of the force, and arrangements for its operation, have been agreed between the British and Australian Governments. The Australian Government is satisfied that proper arrangements have been made, and accordingly it has authorized the despatch of the Australian contingent to Rhodesia.

A small advance party is leaving Australia on 20 December. The main body of the Australian contingent is due to arrive in Salisbury on 24 December, and to move out to operational areas on 25 and 26 December. They will remain on duty throughout the pre-election period. It is intended to withdraw the contingent as soon as practicable after the announcement of the election results, and in any event no later than the independence day for Zimbabwe.

The despatch of Australian soldiers abroad is an important event. Australia has in recent years contributed in various ways to UN peacekeeping and monitoring arrangements, in Cyprus, the Middle East, and Pakistan. There will be risks, as in any such operation. But the Government is satisfied that it has taken a responsible decision as a member of the Commonwealth, in helping to bring about the restoration of peace and democracy in Rhodesia.

Australia will also be sending a team of election observers, and providing a representative for a proposed collective Commonwealth team which is being organised by the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Mr. Ramphal.

The task of the national team will be to observe and to report to the Australian Government and Parliament on whether the elections conducted under the authority of the British Governor are free and fair.

It is proposed that the Commonwealth team report, through the Commonwealth Secretary-General, to Commonwealth Heads of Government. Its membership would be drawn from a representative group of Commonwealth countries.

The Government will announce the composition of Australia's national election observer team, and Australia's representative on the Commonwealth team as soon as possible.

A small Australian Liaison Office will be established in Salisbury to assist the ceasefire monitoring contingent and the election observers. It will also serve as a direct point of contact between the Australian Government and the British authorities in Salisbury.
