



EMBARGO: 3:30 pm  
CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

## PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

SUNDAY, 22 NOVEMBER, 1981

### LAUNCHING OF "HELP POLAND LIVE" APPEAL MELBOURNE

We are here today to extend the helping hand of the people of Australia to the people of Poland in their hour of need. The causes of that need are complex. They have their roots in the economics and politics of post-war Poland. But whatever the causes may be, the situation in Poland today is that the essentials of life are in desperately short supply.

At a time when the northern winter is about to begin, many of the most basic human needs for food, medicines and clothing simply cannot be met. Old people and children are particularly at risk. So the appeal that is being launched here today to "Help Poland Live" strikes a chord at the very heart of our concern for people.

This appeal is not the beginning of the Australian community's attempts to help the people of Poland. Right from the beginning of the present crisis, Polish Australians have been sending an ever increasing volume of assistance. In the last twelve months alone, over \$5 million worth of aid has been sent. Much of this support has taken the form of food parcels and money sent to friends and family.

For Polish Australians, the suffering is not something affecting distant strangers. It is about close family and friends; it is happening in places they know intimately; it reaches them through letters and phone calls, and through conversations with recently arrived refugees.

Poland has not had an easy or peaceful history. Repeatedly over the past two centuries, Poland has come under pressure from powerful neighbours to the West and to the East. The Polish people have had to struggle for their right to exist as an independent state. Through all the years of their history, the courage of the Polish people has been remarkable by any standards.

The political implications of the present crisis in Poland are known to everyone here. In the past year the Australian Government has consistently called for Poland to be left free to solve its difficulties in its own way. This call has been widely echoed internationally, and I want to take this opportunity to recall what 41 Commonwealth leaders had to say in Melbourne last month.

- 2 -

The Communique from the meeting reads as follows: "Heads of Government discussed the situation in Poland. They were concerned that it could have serious implications for the international community as a whole. They considered that the people of Poland should be left to determine their own destiny free from foreign interference."

Poland needs time to sort out its problems so that it can once again stand on its own feet economically - and international aid is required to give it that breathing space.

Many countries, including the United States, Canada and those in the European Economic Community, have already given Government and non-Government assistance, and the Australian Government is guaranteeing commercial trade credits to Poland. We need to be perfectly clear, however, that what community aid to Poland is all about, what this appeal is all about, is the basic welfare of millions of ordinary people who are facing the threat of extreme hardship.

I have no doubt that this appeal will show that Australians are not indifferent to the fate of people in Poland, just as earlier appeals have shown that Australians will contribute magnificently to help alleviate suffering in other parts of the world. The Government also will not be inactive and I shall announce at the end of this speech the contribution that the Government is prepared to make.

The Federal Council of Polish Organisations in Australia is mounting this appeal to collect money for the purchase of food, medicines and other essential supplies. These goods will be forwarded to Poland for distribution by the Catholic Church and Solidarity, the independent trade union movement, and the Government will also make available any necessary assistance from the Australian Embassy in Warsaw. The goods will go to the people most in need.

The appeal is being conducted by the Australian National Committee for Relief to Poland under the Chairmanship of Mr. Frank Galbally. The membership of this Committee is drawn from different political persuasions, religious commitments and walks of life. The appeal is, in the full meaning of the word, national. I am honoured to have been invited to be its patron. Volunteers are coming forward in all States. A number of them are here today. Already a head office in Melbourne is being run by volunteers, with premises and support services provided by the generosity of one of the national Committee members. We are grateful for your time and energy. Thanks to you, the volunteers, the administrative costs will be kept to a bare minimum.

The funds raised will be used for the maximum possible benefit of the Polish people. Australia's links with Poland go back a century and a half, and a common concern with freedom is a recurring theme in that history. In both the 19th and 20th Century Australia has offered a refuge for Poles fleeing oppression in their native land. In the 1860s and during the two World Wars Australians organised relief funds to help Poland while she fought for her liberty. In the Second World War, our soldiers fought tyranny side by side on the battlefield of Tobruk. How appropriate it is that the pioneer explorer Strzelecki named our highest peak after the great Polish fighter for freedom, Kosciuszko.

Today, the number of Australians who have come from, or have personal ties with Poland exceeds 100,000 people. Their skills and efforts have made a significant contribution to Australia's post war development and prosperity. Many were involved in the construction of some of our largest public works projects, such as the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme. Their talents have enriched us in many other fields, among them education, science and the arts. These are all special reasons why we can expect a strong public response to this appeal.

Ladies and gentlemen, Australians whose families have origins in, or links with, Poland have earned a respected place, both as individuals and as a community. They form an integral part of Australia. In a time of distress, they turn for assistance to all their fellow Australians. I launch the appeal with full confidence that Australians will indeed meet the call to "Help Poland Live".

I am very pleased indeed to announce that the Commonwealth Government, to give practical expression to its concern for the people of Poland, has decided to make a cash grant to the appeal of one million dollars.

Mr. Chairman, I have much pleasure in presenting this cheque to the Appeal.