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PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

SPECIAL PREMIERS' CONFERENCE ON DRUGS CANBERRA - 2 APRIL 1985 COMMUNIQUE

The Commonwealth, State and Territory Heads of Government met in Canberra today in a special Premiers' Conference and pledged their governments to do everything possible to combat the growing problems of drug abuse and addiction in Australia. They agreed to mount a National Campaign Against Drug Abuse in which all Governments will co-operate and which will also seek the full involvement and support of the community as a whole.

The Campaign will place a major emphasis on reducing the demand for drugs through education, treatment and rehabilitation programs, particularly for young people and particularly relating to hard drugs.

The Conference noted that the cost to the Australian community of drug abuse is high whether measured in terms of death and illness, wasted human potential, violent and property crime, loss of production or social misery. It was recognised that drug abuse is a complex problem and that there are no simple or quick solutions. The Conference agreed that a sustained effort would be required over a period of years.

The Conference emphasised that governments have a special responsibility to address problems associated with those drugs the use of which is illegal in our society. It was agreed that the Campaign will focus particularly on illegal drugs. At the same time it was recognised that there are also widespread health and social problems arising from the abuse of licit drugs and that the Campaign will need to encompass these as well.

The Conference agreed that it was essential that government efforts to combat drug trafficking and to prevent supplies of hard drugs coming into the country

be intensified. Particular attention will be paid to those who control, direct and finance such activities.

The Conference recognised, however, that the drug problem will not be effectively tackled unless there is success in reducing the demand for drugs. Every effort will be made to convince young people of the dangers of involvement with drugs. Greater assistance and support will be provided for parents, educators, community groups and others who work with and counsel young people. It was also agreed that both the quality and the quantity of treatment and rehabilitation programs for those already suffering from drug addiction should be improved.

Special attention will be given to the needs of particular sectors of the community. The so called hard drugs pose a threat to young people generally: but for other groups, such as aborigines, abuse of licit drugs, or substances, may be more significant problems.

The Conference acknowledged that women's pattern of drug use differs from men's and presents problems which may require different approaches. There are particular problems which need to be addressed in the case of heroin addicted women who may be forced into prostitution or, in the case of pregnant addicts, whose lives and those of their babies may be endangered. The Conference also noted the greater reliance of women on minor tranquillisers and agreed that measures were needed to dissuade doctors and patients from resort to these drugs of addiction.

The Commonwealth Government will contribute to the Campaign by the funding of national projects and by making additional funds available to the States. The States and the Northern Territory will continue and expand existing programs, provide matching funds and administer a major part of Commonwealth funding.

The Commonwealth Government has committed itself to a long-term program of assistance. For the next three years it has agreed to provide up to an additional \$20 million a year for the education, treatment, rehabilitation and research aspects of the campaign. It will also be spending substantially increased amounts on strengthening law enforcement. Of the \$20m, which will be indexed, \$8 million will be allocated for national projects which will be fully funded by the Commonwealth. The remaining \$12 million will be available to the States and Territories to match increased expenditure undertaken by them.

The Campaign will be co-ordinated and oversighted by the Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy which will report to the Premiers' Conference. The Council will have the authority to deal with all matters related to drugs of dependence.

The Conference agreed on the introduction of a number of specific initiatives.

Education Programs

The Conference agreed that, in consultation with the States -

- . The National Drug Education Program will be upgraded;
- . New drug education materials are to be developed, to assist those who educate, counsel or work with young people and others at risk; materials will be made available for use in schools;
- . Use will be made of media campaigns, in conjunction with other drug education initiatives, to inform and educate the community about drug problems, and to provide positive directions to assist the community in preventing and overcoming such problems.
- . Training programs on drug abuse matters for both lay and professional workers in education, health and welfare areas will be improved;
- . 24 hour telephone information services on drugs, staffed by trained counsellors, is recommended in those States and Territories where they do not already exist.

Treatment and Rehabilitation

- . The Conference agreed that existing methadone maintenance programs should be expanded and new ones established; the existing guidelines for the use of methadone will be reviewed. The Conference was opposed to the provision of heroin as a treatment for drug addiction.
- . It was also agreed that a range of special treatment and rehabilitation services for drug abusers be established in teaching hospitals and other major hospitals.
- . Treatment and rehabilitation services are to be made available to drug dependent prisoners.

- . Regular evaluation of programs by community agencies will be a condition of continued government funding of services.

Research and Information

- . The Conference endorsed the establishment of National and State drug data collection systems.
- . It was agreed that there is a need for more ressearch into the prevention and treatment of drug abuse; it has been agreed in principle that one or more centres of excellence will be established; the States have been invited to bring forward proposals.

Legislation

- . It was agreed in principle that there should be uniformity of approach among jurisdictions on legislation governing drugs of dependence, and broad consistency on key issues such as classification of drugs and thrust of offences and penalties. The Conference noted that the Commonwealth is developing a model legislation package covering the regulation of the manufacture, distribution and medical use of drugs of dependence; diversion for treatment; and penal provisions. The package will be developed in consultation with the States.
- . The Conference agreed in principle that legislation be introduced to enable the forfeiture and confiscation of assets of convicted drug dealers. This matter is to be discussed further by the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General.
- . The Conference agreed that there should be a review of the controls on the use of barbiturates and it was agreed that this matter be examined urgently. Existing controls on cannabis are to be maintained.

Law Enforcement

The Conference endorsed the importance of achieving full co-operation between law enforcement authorities both within jurisdictions and between jurisdictions. The Conference called on all relevant authorities to ensure that they work together in a co-operative way.

The Conference noted the actions being taken by the Commonwealth and the States to strengthen their capabilities to deal with drug trafficking. The Commonwealth will over the next three years be spending \$7 million on computer capacity and \$10 million on additional manpower for the Australian Federal Police.

It will provide additional resources of the order of \$1.5 million over the next two years to enhance the capacity of the Australian Bureau of Criminal Intelligence to provide drugs intelligence to all participating law enforcement agencies.

The Commonwealth will also provide substantial resources - equipment and staff costing \$5.5 million over 2 years - to strengthen the capacity of the Australian Customs Service to interdict drugs entering Australia. Fixed barrier operations will be buttressed with additional surveillance, enhanced communication and x-ray machines. There will also be a revised Customs strategy for the North.

The Conference noted that the Australian Police Ministers' Council and the Australian Transport Advisory Council would be considering measures to upgrade waterfront security, including a recommendation for a new National Port Security Authority.

The Conference also noted the recently introduced arrangements for coastal surveillance, including the Coastal Protection Unit within the Australian Federal Police. The importance of ensuring adequate surveillance of the Australian coastline was recognised.

Australia's strong commitment to international efforts to combat drug trafficking will continue. Opportunities for increased co-operation with other countries on narcotics matters will be actively pursued.

The Conference agreed that telephone interception powers can be a valuable aid in investigation of drug trafficking. The Commonwealth will extend such powers in relation to drug trafficking to the States, subject to stringent controls being exercised over their use. The controls will include a requirement for judicial warrants.

The Commonwealth will create a new offence of sending illicit drugs through the mail. The AFP will have powers to examine suspected mail.

The Commonwealth has decided in principle to amend the Customs Act to clarify powers to detain and search persons concealing drugs internally to bring them into Australia; the emphasis will be on detention with medical search as a last resort.

WHO Recommendations

The Conference agreed to refer to the Health Ministers' Conference, for consideration without specific endorsement, strategies on alcohol and tobacco as recommended by the World Health Organisation.

Drugs and Driving

The Conference agreed that States should give consideration to the introduction of zero or equivalent blood alcohol levels for novice drivers, stringent application of penalties, and more severe penalties for persistent drink driving offenders.

Strategy Document

The Conference agreed that a document setting out the aims and strategy of the National Campaign Against Drug Abuse should be prepared by the Commonwealth, in consultation with the States, for release as soon as possible.
