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PRIME MINISTER

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TRANSCRIPT OF PRESS CONFERENCE AT PARLIAMENT HOUSE - 26/02/86

PM: involved now in the Philippines, the corruption that took place in the elections clearly meant that the will of the Philippine people had not been given effect to. Now Mrs Aquino will assume the Presidency and they can get on with the task of bringing economic development to the people of the Philippines within the framework of democracy.

JOURNALIST: willing to make a visit to the Philippines now?

PM: Yes, I am prepared to now. We haven't made any specific plans. What we have done immediately is to arrange that Mr Hayden, who is going off overseas into the region at any rate at the end of this week, will now include the Philippines in his program. And the question of my visiting there is something to work out within the near future. It will be worked out in the near future. When it will take place I am not sure.

JOURNALIST: What is your view of Mrs Aquino, Prime Minister?

PM: Well obviously I haven't had the opportunity of forming judgment at first hand meeting with her. But from what one has seen she is clearly a woman of very considerable courage, fortitude and determination and she will take with her into the Presidency now the best wishes, I think, of not only all Australians but of all men and women of good will around the world. And for the great work to be done there, she seems to have all those qualities of determination and application to do it, Laurie.

JOURNALIST: Do you think she is equipped to handle the problems of the Filipino economy and the NPA?

PM: Well, there is no reason to assume that she is not. I mean after all leadership is not simply a question of some sound, detailed, theoretical knowledge of economics. She will, I am sure, gather around her people who have the necessary expertise as she seems to have as a leader, as I say, the determination, capacity of application which is required to undertake a very important and difficult task that lies ahead of her.

JOURNALIST: Would Australia be offering any expertise?

PM: Well, we have there already within the embassy facility. We have made it clear that if there is any assistance which they would seek in addition to what we have been doing now, we would obviously give very positive consideration to that.

JOURNALIST: Do you think it will be any more than just transfer of power from one wealthy group to another wealthy group?

PM: Yes, I think it will be more than that because I would believe that Mrs Aquino will realise that the world is looking now not for that sort of transfer of power and influence but an application of the powers of the Presidency and the powers of administration to advancing the real interests of the mass of the Philippine people.

JOURNALIST: Is it fair that Mr Marcos should be leaving the country? Should he stay in the Philippines and be judged by his people?

PM: Well, I think that the events of the last few weeks have basically been marked by a relative lack of violence which is to the credit of the Filipinos. I don't think that very much is served by a detailed going into the events that have led up to this position. The only thing that I must say that I find galling and I would think the people of the Philippines would find particularly galling is the apparent rape of the wealth of the Philippines by President Marcos. He seems to have salted away enormous amounts, some put it into billions, others in the hundreds of millions. I think if some way could be found to ensure that that property of the people of the Philippines could be restored, that would obviously be a good thing.

JOURNALIST: Has he salted any away in Australia?

PM: Not that I am aware of.

JOURNALIST: What if he had?

PM: Well, then that would be a question for approach by the new administration of the Philippines and for discussion between us. But that is entirely hypothetical. I have not any knowledge of any such salting away here, Laurie.

JOURNALIST: Can you understand why President Reagan seems so happy to be offering Mr Marcos and his family asylum?

PM: I hadn't noticed happiness.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, do you think that the Americans could have acted a little sooner given that they had knowledge of

PM: Well, I guess that the United States administration wanted to be quite sure that the processes were going to work out there in a way which did reflect the will of the people there. And they did not want or wish to be too precipitated in their intervention. I would say that it is very hard to be critical of the way in which the United States has played their hand in the

events of the last few weeks. I mean I must say that
outside observation of what's happened, the Soviet Union who
seems to be the defender President Marcos has been accusing the
United States of being too forthcoming in its intervention and
support of Mrs Aquino. That is a very interesting state of
affairs.

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