



## PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF NEWS CONFERENCE, ORIENTAL HOTEL,  
SINGAPORE, 17 OCTOBER 1989

E & O E - PROOF ONLY

JOURNALIST: Mr Malcolm Fraser went through last night on his way to Kuala Lumpur exuding confidence about winning the election for Secretary General. Is he being a bit too optimistic ?

PM: No, I believe that, as I've said, that Mr Fraser is slightly in front. I thought that before I came. The discussions that I've been able to have since I've been here have confirmed that impression.

JOURNALIST: Do you think the vote will wait for the Langkawi retreat, or do you think that ...?

PM: That's a matter that needs to be discussed when we get there. Expressing my own view, let me say I think it would be better from the Commonwealth's point of view - and I'm not just saying in terms of our interests - but I think it would be better from the Commonwealth's point of view if the matter were decided from the outset, because otherwise it seems to me that it would just permeate the conference right through; there'd be lobbying going on and I think even the contributions of some people on particular issues may be coloured by their perceptions of how it may affect the vote and so on. I wouldn't think anyone's interests are served by delaying it.

JOURNALIST: Is your feeling that as a whole the African countries would show a general leaning towards General Anyaoku?

PM: You would assume that, if you look at it in regional terms, there would be a tendency for the Africans to want an African, and that's understandable I believe, generally speaking. But the facts are that there isn't a solid block of African support for the Chief, and we know that we have some African support. I think that has two elements of significance. First,

(PM Cont) just in a straight numbers sense, that there are some votes in Africa. Secondly, I think that that fact of itself will have an influence on some others. There would be some I believe who would take the view that if there was a total African consensus, that that is something that would have to be taken into account, but the fact that some Africans would be supporting Mr Fraser would make them feel that they are free to cast their vote for the one they think in all the circumstances is the better candidate, that is Mr Fraser.

JOURNALIST: Do you believe a secret ballot would in fact help those Africans who want to support him, to vote for Mr Fraser ?

PM: Let me make this point; I think there is absolutely no question that it must be a secret ballot. I think any alternative is absolutely unacceptable because in the end it is only in a secret ballot that people can be absolutely confident in expressing the real view that they hold. Secondly, that we all want - and if this sounds something of a paradox I know - but in the end we want something which, if not being a full consensus, is close to a consensus in that if there is a secret ballot and one or the other wins, then we all want to be able to say, "Well that's it, and we are all behind the outcome". I've made it quite clear, and I repeat from Australia's point of view, that if there's a ballot and the chief wins then he has Australia's unqualified support, and we will say so and we will mean it. Now it's much easier for every Head of Government to take that position after a secret ballot. It's somewhat more difficult if you've actually got a show of hands, and that person shows his hand up for the other bloke, and that person had his hand up for the person who wins, it's much more difficult in those circumstances for you know, the reality of a consensus position to be taken.

JOURNALIST: As to financial sanctions against South Africa, do you believe the British will support you in this?

PM: I haven't had the opportunity yet of talking to Margaret Thatcher, and I'll obviously be talking to her up there before the matter comes on. I just want to repeat the broad position. I think it would be churlish not to recognise that some change has occurred with the new President. It just would be churlish not to recognise that fact. But on the other hand the fundamentals have not changed, and what I would hope we could do would be to recognise that the changes that have occurred which ought to be recognised, have not

(PM Cont) emerged by accident. In my judgement, they have emerged because there has been pressure, pressure from the Commonwealth basically but from others as well. I think what the Commonwealth has to do is to try and convey to the regime in South Africa that what has happened is but a beginning and that there has to be a commitment to fundamental change to the move towards a democratic, non-racial South Africa. That's the objective, that's what has to be achieved, and our very grave responsibility as a meeting of Commonwealth Heads of Government is to take account of all the facts and to so formulate our decisions that we maximise the earliest possibility of a move towards such a democratic, non-racial South Africa.

JOURNALIST: Has your suggestion of an early resolution of the Secretary General's issue, has that fallen on fertile ground with the talks you've had in - ?

PM: Of the people to whom I've spoken the logic of that has recommended itself.

JOURNALIST: Well, if that takes place Mr Hawke, when would you expect the ballot to go ahead?

PM: Well, I don't wish to pre-empt what the decision will be. What I'm doing in response to your proper questions is indicate what the most logical position is. Neither Chief Anyaoku or Malcolm Fraser are advantaged or disadvantaged it seems to me by having the decision taken at the outset by a secret ballot. The Commonwealth on the other side is advantaged by being able then to go ahead and consider all its other important items without this matter overhanging. I just hope that the logic of that would recommend itself to my colleagues. But I want to listen to what they have to say, if there is some argument that they may have that hasn't occurred to me against that, well I'll be open to hearing that argument.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, if I could change the tack slightly. Are you concerned of John Kerin's criticism of the Kakadu decision?

PM: London Convention, comrade. London Convention, L-C-C.

JOURNALIST: ...London Convention if I asked you if you have a comment on Dr Hewson's attack on the press for the coverage of the tax policy.

PM: I hope I won't sound sexist in this, but I find your attempt to break the London Convention somewhat more appealing and compelling than old Peter Harvey up

(PM Cont) the background, but I am non-sexist, I haven't got one rule for an ugly old fellow and another one for a beautiful young lady. The London Convention still applies.

JOURNALIST: How did your talks go this morning, Mr Hawke ?

PM: The talks I've had now - I've been here less than twenty four hours - they've been very, very productive. I've found them very useful.

JOURNALIST: How much attention will this Cole & Ovenden Report get here, at CHOGM?

PM: It will obviously get a very considerable degree of report, it deserves to because it is the product of a very great deal of hard, intelligent work and it's recommended itself to a wide range of people and it will obviously receive a great deal of attention.

JOURNALIST: ... much support for the Antarctic initiative at the CHOGM meeting?

PM: Well, it's not of itself going to be a major issue. The environment in general will be, and obviously within our consideration the environment, we'll make a reference to that, but it won't as I say of itself be a major issue I think. Thank you.

JOURNALIST: Thank you Sir.