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PRIME MINISTER

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**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
ELEVENTH ASIAN REGIONAL
CONFERENCE OF INTERPOL
CANBERRA - 26 FEBRUARY 1991**

Commissioner Peter McAulay,
Delegates to the Eleventh Asian Regional Conference of
Interpol

This is the first time that Australia has hosted a major Interpol conference. So the welcome that we extend to you is a particularly warm one.

We appreciate your choice of Australia as the venue for this conference. It is an appropriate choice. Australia is playing an increasingly prominent role in the international effort to combat crime - through, for example, our new role as the Interpol regional communication centre for the South Pacific.

We meet at a time when the world community is facing an acute challenge. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait last year threatened in a blatant and brutal way the principles of international security and stability on which we all depend.

Australia has played a timely and commensurate role in supporting the allied effort, under the auspices of the United Nations, to seek Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait.

Regrettably that effort has recently had to be intensified with the commencement of a ground offensive to eject Iraq from Kuwait - an offensive that only became necessary because Saddam Hussein has consistently and determinedly defied the world community by his refusal to withdraw without conditions.

It will certainly be a difficult military task but it is one in which I am confident of ultimate success for the allied forces.

While our attention is focussed on the war in the Gulf - which we hope will be over soon - this audience is involved with the war against crime - which never stops.

It is very relevant to note that in both these struggles, the way forward lies essentially with the same means. A successful outcome will be achieved only through effective and deliberate international cooperation.

Crime itself is no respecter of national boundaries.

So crime prevention, too, must be an international effort.

There are many signs that this kind of effective cooperation is in fact emerging. The continuing relevance of Interpol is one of them. The growing cooperation of national police forces throughout our region is another. The development of treaties of extradition and of mutual assistance is yet another. And this conference is one more sign - a very welcome one, and one which I trust will be productive and instructive for you all.

Delegates,

In our dynamic Asia-Pacific region, our nations have learned well the lessons of our interdependence.

As a region, we are all the beneficiaries of the massive expansion of trade within the region, the larger regional GNPs, the stronger regional investment, the higher standards of living.

In a region that was once regarded by much of the world as an area ravaged by international conflict and by widespread impoverishment, we are now showing the way forward towards prosperity and regional cooperation.

All this lay behind my call in 1989 for the establishment of the new forum for Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation - APEC. I saw the need for a means by which the economies of the region could meet together to achieve closer regional economic cooperation.

I have been enormously gratified at the steady progress APEC has made since it first met here in Canberra in November 1989.

The relevance to a police forum of these comments about economic cooperation should be clear.

Because just as the recognition of regional and global interdependence has ramifications for economic policy makers, and for all those who contribute in one way or another to the creation of prosperity - farmers, industrialists, investors, tourists, exporters - so interdependence has direct and vital implications for regional police work.

At one level, interdependence means that national boundaries, which once represented very significant barriers to the flow of goods and services and people, are becoming less impassible and more porous.

To see the truth of that, one need only consider the dramatic developments planned for Europe in 1992, or the free trade bloc developed in North America or, closer to home, the Closer Economic Relations process involving Australia and New Zealand.

Throughout the world, nations are gaining confidence in the fact that greater openness, and in particular the easier entry of foreign goods, ultimately helps boost living standards all round.

Visas, once a hard-won symbol of a nation's right to deny entry to foreigners are becoming steadily easier to obtain and in many cases are being eliminated entirely - in those countries that wish to encourage the influx of tourists and the consequent creation of jobs and capital inflows.

Where artificial barriers persist - as in the case of the trade barriers erected around the protected farms of Europe - one sees a diminution of economic efficiency and, thus, of living standards.

The recognition of interdependence is of course very welcome. But I accept that it poses headaches for police forces.

It makes it easier for criminals and criminal organisations to flourish and to flout national laws. While it allows tourists and businessmen to come and go with greater freedom, drug runners and terrorists benefit as well.

The solution for law enforcers is not of course to seek to turn back the clock to days of insularity and isolation but to step forward into a new era of international cooperation.

So Interpol is an important and integral part of the strategies used by nations to pursue criminals within their national boundaries, and to detect and prevent the movement of criminals and their organisations between countries.

In the same way, treaties of extradition and mutual assistance are adding new strength to the armoury of law enforcement agencies.

Australia has now concluded such treaties and agreements with countries on all continents.

The territorial concept underlying many countries' criminal law systems had the disadvantage in the past of limiting investigative assistance to that which could be obtained with the voluntary cooperation of witnesses.

But under the new agreements, for example, search warrants can be issued in Australia to locate evidence of a crime committed in another country. And recognising that a fundamental motivation for crime is profit, the new system of international cooperation makes it harder for criminals to profit from their crime by moving the proceeds offshore.

Delegates,

Through increased international cooperation, we can step up our efforts against those who threaten civilised standards of law and order, whether within or among the nations of the world.

In particular no nation can afford to assume that it can, on its own resources, turn back the threat posed by those twin evils - international terrorism and the drug trade.

Drug trafficking and international terrorism are major law enforcement problems facing the international community. Drug traffickers and terrorists do not respect national boundaries. They prey on the weak, the young and the innocent of all nations. Our countries must strengthen their co-operative resolve if our communities are to be protected from these predators.

Australia has largely avoided the impact of international terrorism. We are a peaceful and tolerant people, and we take pride in the fact that as a multicultural community we have no interest in seeing the divisions and conflicts of other countries given new life here.

Yet when Australians see campaigns of terror waged in other countries against innocent people, they are justifiably outraged - and concerned that our record of relative safety might be threatened.

One of the most despicable elements of Saddam Hussein's career - evident most notably since he invaded Kuwait last year - has been his ruthless and, indeed, his barbaric willingness to make innocent civilians, including innocent Iraqi civilians, pay the price of his ambitions.

During the Gulf conflict, I have been frequently asked what assurances can be given that Australians will not be added to the list of victims of Saddam's terror.

Some would reply that no guarantee can be given, because terrorism is by nature a ruthless and unpredictable activity.

But I give a different answer.

Australia has good surveillance and counter-terrorist capabilities. They are strengthened by the kind of international cooperation represented by this conference.

Together, we must make it clear to those nations and organisations who sponsor terrorism that their strategy will not succeed. We will not succumb to their threats or accede to their demands, and our societies will prove resilient enough to withstand this challenge.

Equally, we will not stand idly by if innocent citizens are killed or maimed. We will work to ensure that terrorists are brought to book and that they pay for their crimes.

That is the only way to deal with terrorists.

But to make that determination stick, we need the continued vigilance, the ceaseless diligence, the continuing international cooperation, the pooling of resources and intelligence, of our law enforcement agencies throughout the world.

In developing our international response to organised crime, we need to be innovative and determined.

For example, Australia has established a network of Australian Federal Police liaison officers in some 15 countries around the world - more than half of them based in the Asia-Pacific region.

This has materially assisted us to improve the amount and quality of information available on criminal activity. Recent successful large scale drug trafficking investigations were facilitated by liaison between the Australian Federal Police officers and their counterparts in the South East Asian region.

Australia also provides financial assistance to allow countries in the Asia and Pacific region to develop particular projects and to train their personnel. One such project we have assisted is the Office of Narcotics Control Board computer facility in Thailand, which has realised enormous benefits to both our countries in tackling the drug trafficking problem.

However, vigorous international co-operation has to be matched by equally vigorous action at home if we are successfully to oppose drug trafficking. There would be no drug trade if there were no producers or users.

Some countries have a tradition, established over a long period of time, of growing crops which are used in the manufacture of illicit drugs. We must encourage and assist the farmers of these countries, who depend on such crops for their livelihood, to produce alternative crops.

During my visit to Thailand in 1989 I inspected a project doing just this - the King's Royal Crop Substitution Project near Chiang Mai. This project helps provide the hilltribes people with a living through the production of cash crops rather than opium. Initiatives like this demonstrate that, with a positive will, solutions can be found to the supply problem.

For our own part, Australia follows a policy of destruction or confiscation of illicit drug crops and the prosecution of convicted growers.

There is also the need, of course, to reduce the demand for drugs. We have embarked on a major national educational effort to warn people of the dangers of drugs. This message forms part of our National Campaign Against Drug Abuse which also provides for the treatment of drug users. The campaign is aimed at all members of Australian society, and is particularly directed towards the young.

It will be through internal efforts such as this and a continued commitment to close international co-operation that we will see headway being made against the scourge of the drug trade.

My friends,

Not so very many years ago, the countries of our region would not perhaps have accorded a conference such as this very high billing.

From Australia's point of view, a conference about law enforcement would not have been seen as dealing with a primary concern of our foreign policy.

I am certain that our interrelationship as members of the region have become much more diverse and more mature since then.

Today, cooperation among law enforcement agencies makes a useful and, indeed, a vital contribution to the protection and enhancement of our individual and our collective interests.

The encouragement of such cooperation is a legitimate interest of Governments and is an important aim of foreign policy.

In an interdependent world, citizens of one country are justifiably concerned about whether their livelihood will be threatened by the activities of criminals based in another country.

They see the threat that organised crime, drug dealers and terrorists pose to their societies; they see the damage that such criminals are wreaking in parts of the world.

They demand that Governments do all they can to defeat those law breakers and to safeguard the lives and futures of the innocent.

They are right to make those demands.

In opening this conference, let me express the hope - and the confidence - that your work here and in the future will help Governments meet those demands.

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