



PRIME MINISTER

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**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
1991 LIONS INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION
BRISBANE, 19 JUNE 1991**

Bill Biggs, International President,
Distinguished guests,
ladies and gentlemen

At the outset I want to welcome, on behalf of the people and the Government of Australia, the International Association of Lions Clubs to Brisbane and to Australia, and wholeheartedly to wish you well in your convention.

This is the first International Convention that Lions have held in the Southern Hemisphere and we are delighted that you have chosen Australia for what we hope is only the first of many return journeys for you.

It's a pleasure to see such a large gathering of international visitors, drawn from more than 100 countries - and it is a pleasure too to see the way in which Australia's Lions, your hosts and guides, are working to ensure your stay here is enjoyable and memorable.

The Lions movement - today on the eve of its 75th anniversary - is truly one of the great international and multicultural movements, spanning the continents and uniting people of diverse cultures and backgrounds in a common commitment to community service.

You are dedicated to creating and fostering a spirit of understanding among the peoples of the world, and to uniting your clubs around the world in bonds of friendship, good fellowship and mutual understanding. In other words, Lions is both a catalyst and a model, in these challenging times, for the emergence of more harmonious relations among the people and the nations of the world.

It must certainly be obvious to everyone assembled here that this Convention does take place against an international backdrop of the most dramatic, and in some respects the most uplifting, changes seen in more than four decades.

The last few years have seen the end of the Cold War, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and - particularly over the last year - the re-invigoration of the United Nations to the point where we can hope it will become in fact the instrument of global order envisaged by its founders.

The end of the Cold War has borne double fruit. Not only has the threat of global nuclear war been lifted, but the ideal of international co-operation to keep the peace - an ideal which lay dormant through the long years of the Cold War - has now sprung to life once more.

The success of the United Nations, and of the multinational coalition led by the United States, in confronting and reversing the invasion of Kuwait has far reaching and positive consequences for us all.

But despite all this we cannot, of course, afford naive optimism about the future of international relations.

Economic under-development in the Third World is still a tragically unresolved problem. The spectres of hunger and desertification in Africa continue to loom. Population pressures still increase. The plight of refugees continues to challenge us. Global environmental degradation threatens humankind in ways which could ultimately be as significant as, albeit more gradual and insidious than, the nuclear threat.

We see the continuing struggle within the Soviet Union to contain and repair the damage inflicted on its political and economic structures by the illogicalities of those decades of centralised planning - and in observing that continuing struggle we can at best conclude that the outcome is uncertain.

And underlining all these difficulties is the continuing crisis in world trade. In the face of the still unresolved Uruguay Round of trade negotiations, it would be irresponsible to be optimistic about the world economic structure.

So my friends, as members of an organisation with a truly international spirit and a truly global perspective, you will conclude with me, even on the basis of this very cursory assessment, that for all our justified euphoria in seeing the end of the Cold War, the current international climate contains many profound challenges for us all.

The beneficial changes we have experienced do provide a firm basis for us to mould a more enlightened international order. But there needs to be a realisation that the challenges in this new, fluid, multipolar world are no lesser challenges than those of the static certainties of the old bipolar world they replace.

How are these challenges to be solved? And how is this international order to be created?

In essence, the challenge we face in the 1990s, at the end of the Cold War, is analogous to the challenge of 1945, at the end of the Second World War. Each country and region of course will have its own particular suggestions and perspectives.

But the guidelines which should provide our direction in managing this transition in international relations are clear.

They are in essence the same principles that give life to the great multilateral organisations born in the 1940s - the principles of fair and open international trade enshrined in the GATT; the principles of economic development and sound, market-oriented economic management, which govern the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund; the commitment to a better quality of life, which provides the fundamental rationale for the United Nations specialised agencies; and not least, the principles of respect for national sovereignty and international cooperation enshrined in the charter of the United Nations Organisation.

The challenge is to ensure peace through international cooperation; to apply enlightened self interest in an interconnected world - in short, to live up to the high ideals and the realistic expectations of those far sighted men and women who in that great burst of statesmanship in the 1940s laid the basis for multilateral activity today.

And we must make certain that the principles of the United Nations concerning respect for sovereignty and peaceful dispute settlement are enshrined not just in the Charter but in the real world, by giving them concrete backing.

This is a responsibility which many powers must share. We hope the US will keep alive the internationalist spirit which has sustained it in fulfilling its responsibilities which flow from great power. And because of the relative shift of economic power, there is clear scope for others to bear more of the responsibilities and of the burden - clearly, including Western Europe and Japan.

In the United Nations and other international institutions, in the Western community of nations and in the Asia-Pacific region, Australia is well placed to play a role. We have a myriad of specific interests to pursue and protect - our independence of action will always be vital in our foreign, defence, trade and international economic policies. But we recognise that a real contribution to the larger reshaping of international relations can only be effectively made by working with others.

Our commitment to multilateralism will help guide our foreign policy in the decade ahead.

Our rapid and firm support for the United Nations' stand against Iraq testifies to our commitment to multilateralism.

Our initiative in establishing the Cairns Group of like-minded agricultural-exporting countries, which has been critical in having agriculture recognised as the lynchpin to the Uruguay Round, likewise testifies to our commitment to multilateralism. And one of the objectives of APEC - the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation - of which Australia is a founding member, is the encouragement of free and open international trade, as a key to global prosperity.

In our own region, we have sought with others to find a formula for peace in Cambodia, to bring peace and stability to that country, and an end to its people's suffering.

Australia recognises that the role we are able to play in global security is necessarily somewhat limited. But we are one of the most active nations in the measured pursuit of disarmament - including, through the United Nations and other negotiating forums, the abolition of chemical weapons.

My friends,

The creation of a saner and a safer world is within the grasp of the international community. Australia will play its part.

But I want to close by saying to you, the thousands of assembled delegates of Lions International, that the attainment of this goal is not a task for governments alone.

Indeed, without the active and intelligent support of individual people, and of international networks of people such as the Lions movement, the work of governments will falter and fail.

Ultimately, if we are to succeed in creating a saner and a safer world, it will be because people throughout the nations of the world have determined to achieve that goal.

Let me say in particular that the Lions project to eradicate preventable blindness around the world, and its continued involvement in drug prevention programs, are precisely the kinds of actions that I am talking about.

In the same way, voluntary relief organisations have played an indispensable role in alleviating hardship throughout the world - nowhere more starkly in recent weeks than in the Horn of Africa and in Bangladesh.

We are all in their debt because of the dedication and not infrequently the courage with which they do their work.

And the significance of their work is emphasised because it so often is conducted in areas beyond the proper reach of Governments, and mobilises resources additional to those that are allocated by Governments.

So to this gathering I say in closing: you are very welcome among us in Australia. Your mission of service, and your achievements, stand as an example to governments around the world of what can be achieved, with determination and dedication, to attain the goal of a better world.

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