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PRIME MINISTER

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**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
PARLIAMENTARY LUNCH IN HONOUR OF THE
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS,
HIS EXCELLENCY MR GEORGE VASSILIOU
CANBERRA - 12 DECEMBER 1991**

President Vassiliou
Mrs Vassiliou
Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen

Mr President

I am very pleased you have been able to accept my invitation to visit Australia. It is an honour and a pleasure to have you here.

We last met at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Harare in October. The Harare CHOGM showed the Commonwealth to be an organisation of continuing relevance and vitality, committed to the protection and promotion of just and honest government, fundamental human rights and democratic values. The commitment of your Government to the Commonwealth and its values has been reflected in your agreement to host the next CHOGM in 1993.

Mr President, during our discussions this morning, we spoke at length about the still outstanding problem of the partition of Cyprus. I was most interested to hear your analysis of the present situation, and I was impressed by your determination to find a solution.

As you know, Australia has always condemned the Turkish occupation of Cyprus. We uphold the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Cyprus. And we have supported UN Security Council Resolutions 541, 550, 64 and 716. We have consistently expressed opposition to the unilateral declaration of the Turkish republic of Northern Cyprus in 1983.

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We have been extensively involved in efforts to restore peace in Cyprus through our participation in the United Nations peacekeeping force. At present, we have 20 men and women of the Australian Federal Police on duty there.

Those men and women, and their colleagues from many other countries, provide an invaluable service. I have nothing but praise and respect for them, and I am proud of the contribution Australia has been able to make to that effort.

The search for a just, peaceful and permanent solution to the problems of Cyprus is a major challenge to the international community. The ability of the international community to meet that challenge has been greatly strengthened over recent years by the emergence of the United Nations as a truly effective instrument of international action.

We have fully supported the efforts of the current Secretary-General to resolve the Cyprus problem, and we urge his distinguished successor to continue and expand those efforts. We also urge the United States and the European Community to maintain the momentum for a UN-sponsored settlement.

Last year I had the opportunity to discuss the issue with President Ozal. I pressed him then on the need for Turkey to take decisive steps if the issue is to be resolved. I believe he understands that it is in the interests of Turkey, and of the whole region, that the future of Cyprus should be resolved quickly, and in a just and durable manner. I urge Turkey's new Prime Minister, Demirel, to commit himself to the search for such a resolution.

We are disappointed that prospects are now fading for a high-level meeting between the parties before the end of the year, but we hope the momentum can be regained early in the new year.

I believe the momentous changes that have swept the world in the past two years give cause for greater hope for a settlement for Cyprus.

The old restraints of the Cold War have been broken. Old modes of thinking are no longer relevant. And there is a new spirit of international cooperation based on the realisation of common goals and interests.

There are no easy answers. Imagination, flexibility and political determination are essential.

All parties must participate constructively and openly in inter-communal negotiations. It is time to look forward to possibilities and opportunities, rather than back to hatred and bitterness.

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I believe it is becoming increasingly clear, in the post-Cold War world, that people's well-being can only be assured through the principles I outlined earlier, those identified and espoused by Commonwealth Heads of Government at the Harare meeting - democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and just and honest government.

Mr President,

Australia is in a fortunate position. We are geographically remote from much of the world's turmoil, and suffer no immediate threats. We are rich in resources. We enjoy a democratic system of government. And, importantly, we have many Australians of diverse ethnic backgrounds who are willing to contribute to Australia's well-being.

Australia is proud that, in particular since World War II, we have attracted to our shores millions of new settlers from more than 130 nations around the world. One of our great assets is the vigour and vitality of our multicultural society.

Cypriot migration and establishment in Australia has a long and proud history going back to the gold-rush era of the 1850s. The period of upheaval in 1974 saw a substantial rise in immigration from Cyprus, with the result that around 50,000 Cypriots now call Australia home.

Cypriots participate in and contribute to all walks of life - education, sport, business and government. One well-known member of the Cypriot community who is also a member of this Parliament is Dr Andrew Theophanous, who I know is already known to you.

These sons and daughters of Cyprus, now Australians, are very welcome among us. Like you, Mr President, they personify a rich and ancient culture, and a vibrant commitment to achievement. We have been enriched by their contribution to our multicultural society. And we respect the way in which they have contributed to our society and economy through the traditions and achievements of their culture.

Australia's multicultural society works because all Australians are able to express and share their individual cultural heritage, to practise their religion, to speak their language. It works because all Australians are treated equally. It works because there is an overriding commitment to Australia, to its institutions, its interests and its future.

I believe the Australian achievement of a multicultural society has something to teach the world. Culture, history, language and race should not divide, or become the focus of hate - diversity should enrich and invigorate society.

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Mr President,

Australia and Cyprus have a close and friendly relationship, based on our historical links, our Commonwealth membership, the ties of blood and culture through the many Australians of Cypriot origin and our mutual interest in seeking a just and peaceful resolution to the partition of Cyprus.

Your visit provides the opportunity to build on these solid foundations.

Again, we are honoured by your presence here, and wish you a fruitful and enjoyable visit.

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