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PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON. P.J. KEATING, M.P., UNITED NATIONS CENTRE, NEW YORK, U.S.A. 15 SEPTEMBER, 1993

J: Prime Minister, did the U.N. ask for any more Australian contribution to peacekeeping efforts?

PM: No, I had the chance of a good discussion with the Secretary-General about the United Nations, about its role in the world today and its future. I reassured him of Australia's commitment to the United Nations, as a foundation member, which has always paid its dues on time and which has committed itself to the serious work of the U.N., including peace keeping. The Secretary-General told me that there is great difficulty in managing the organisation with many countries not paying their funding to the organisation on time - which, he says, constrains its capacity to play the role it can play in the world.

I've assured him that we will continue to be the stolid supporters of the organisation which we are and that his agenda for peace initiative - which he unveiled some time ago - that Australia is responding to that seriously with a major work. And that in all the other activities that the United Nations undertakes we'll continue to play the role we've played. In the course of his discussions with me he indicated that the U.N.'s role goes, of course, beyond peace keeping to other agendas; like the agenda for women and other humanitarian and social programs. And I indicated to him that Australia was intent upon holding an international conference on multiculturalism next year and he indicated, very generously, support for that proposal. So, we shall probably end up, I think, next year holding a conference on multiculturalism - an international conference, with the support of the United Nations and its Secretary-General.

J: How extensively did you preview the Evans proposals?

PM: Not extensively but he said he was grateful that Australia had responded and was participating in the debate about the organisation's future. And that was the kind of debate that he wanted stimulated and he was pleased that we were responding in the serious way that we were.

J: Did you express any reservations about some of the, apparently, appalling things the U.N. has been up to in Somalia?

- 2 -

PM: No, only to say that I thought that if the U.N's prestige matters that like any other organisation it has got to build a constituency for itself within the populations and the communities of member states. That whatever it does it should try and pick its mark so that what it does it does well. So that with its prestige high, its charter can then be more effective.

J: So, are you concerned about some of the things going on in Somalia?

PM: Well, in some respects, in some particular things, yes. But, I didn't go to the particular in this discussion.

J: Do you think Australia is doing enough, sufficiently, in the peace keeping area?

PM: Well, we've I think, at the moment got about 600 people in Cambodia. We're in the Middle East and the Sahara and I think probably we've got upwards of 700 people around the world in peace keeping. I think the Secretary-General thinks we're pulling our weight which I am sure we are. And, in Australia's terms, we can only support this organisation institutionally, support the requests when we think we can meet them and play our role and pay our dues on time.

J: Did you discuss East Timor with the Secretary-General, Sir?

PM: No.

J: Could you comment on the latest U.S. moves to put pressure on the Government of Indonesia?

PM: No. I didn't discuss it with him.

J: But could you comment?

PM: No, I'm not here to discuss that.

J: Mr Keating you haven't thought about taking a peace keeping force with you to confront the tabloids in London, have you?

PM: No, I thought you'd do that.

Ends.