



PRIME MINISTER

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP PARLIAMENTARY MOTION ON FRENCH NUCLEAR TESTING

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

I move that this House:

- (1) condemns the decision of the Government of France to resume nuclear testing in the South Pacific;
- (2) calls on the French Government to reverse its decision and not to resume testing;
- (3) shares the resentment of South Pacific countries at nuclear testing in the South Pacific and endorses the statement condemning the decision issued by the South Pacific Forum;
- (4) deplores France's decision to breach its 1992 moratorium which had improved relations between France and countries in the region;
- (5) expresses its outrage that France's decision undermines the outcome of the recent Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons Review and Extension Conference, particularly the commitment made at the Conference that, pending entry into force of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), the nuclear weapon states should exercise utmost restraint;
- (6) notes that Australia will do all in its power and urge all other countries to hold France to President Chirac's statement that France would sign a CTBT without reservation in autumn 1996; and
- (7) calls on France to sign and ratify the protocols of the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty.

This resolution is intended to convey as clearly as possible to the Government of France the firm condemnation by the people of Australia, acting through their representatives in this House, of the decision announced

by the Government of France to resume the testing of nuclear weapons at Mururoa Atoll. It also expresses our hope that the decision might yet be reversed.

The President of France, President Chirac, announced the decision to resume underground nuclear testing on 13 June. He said that a program of eight tests would be conducted between September 1995 and May 1996. President Chirac said that the testing was essential in order to ensure the security, safety and reliability of France's nuclear weapons. He said that after completing this series of tests, France would intend to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, and to rely thereafter on simulation techniques to maintain its nuclear capabilities.

The decision reversed the moratorium on nuclear testing announced by President Mitterrand in 1992, a moratorium which had been widely welcomed and which - together with the earlier Matignon Accords which set up a basis for reconciliation in New Caledonia - formed the foundation on which a new, cooperative partnership between France and the countries of the South Pacific was emerging.

President Chirac's announcement on 13 June followed widespread speculation in France about the future of the testing program during the Presidential election campaign and afterwards.

In response to this speculation, Australia, along with many other countries, had made known to the French Government our hopes that the moratorium would be maintained. I wrote to President Chirac about this matter following earlier representations made by the Foreign Minister, Senator Evans. The French moratorium matched separate commitments by the United States, Russian and British Governments to refrain from testing.

In the end, however, the French Government ignored the views of the vast majority of members of the international community and decided to proceed with its program. That is an indefensible decision and the Australian people and the Australian Government condemn it.

Australia's opposition to the resumed testing of nuclear weapons by France stems from a number of concerns, of which the most fundamental is the security implications of the decision for Australia, for the South Pacific region and for the international community.

The end of the Cold War, having removed the spectre of global nuclear conflict which had thrown such a dark shadow on the second half of the twentieth century, gave new hope to the world that we might at last see a world free of nuclear weapons.

An important sign post towards a safer world was the decision by the international community on 11 May 1995 in New York to extend indefinitely the Treaty on the Non Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. Critical to achieving

the indefinite extension of the NPT was the simultaneous negotiation and adoption by all parties to the NPT, including the nuclear weapon states of a "Declaration of Principles and Objectives on Non Proliferation and Disarmament".

This Declaration included, centrally, a commitment to the goal of nuclear disarmament, with the ultimate objective of the total elimination of nuclear weapons. It gave encouragement to the further development of nuclear weapon free zones.

And it said that one important measure towards the elimination of nuclear weapons was the early conclusion, no later than 1996, of a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. Pending the entry into force of a Test Ban Treaty, the nuclear weapon states were committed to exercise "utmost restraint".

The French decision clearly contradicts this undertaking. 'Utmost restraint' on nuclear testing cannot possibly comprehend a program of eight tests. The decision is certain to raise in the minds of non nuclear weapon states questions about the good faith of all the nuclear weapons states. It will add to the negotiating difficulties over the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

France's action might well provide a convenient excuse for others who might want to join the nuclear club, and who will now argue that the commitment of the nuclear weapons states to the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons is a sham.

This is a critical time for the world. The cold war has ended but what will shape our future security and prosperity is still uncertain. We are moulding the building blocks now.

It is particularly important that all governments work together to ensure that the international system we have in the twenty first century is one which suits all of us better than the one we have had.

The French decision is a narrow decision, made according to a narrow definition of narrowly French interests. It defies world opinion, but that is the only bold thing about it. In every other sense it betrays timidity. It is an act of retreat, not engagement.

As I said on 15 June, why should a country of such substance undertake this program? What is there to fear in cooperative engagement with the rest of the world? What will best protect the French people is not a 1990s version of the Maginot line, but participation in the global dialogue.

The French Government claims that this nuclear capacity - this force de frappe - is a deterrent. But in the post Cold War world, a deterrent to what?

It is certainly no deterrent against the greatest nuclear threats to Europe and the world now, including the emergence of new nuclear weapons states.

France, by its inflammatory action with regard to its testing program, now runs the greater risk of losing international support, both moral and material, for cleaning up the rotting carcasses of the old Soviet reactors, whose presence still hangs over Europe and France like a pall. This is one of France's and Europe's great challenges. These dangers, like the stockpiles of degrading nuclear weapons and weapons systems, and contaminated nuclear sites, cannot be deterred through the further development of an offensive nuclear weapon capability.

These considerations are international in scope. They also shape Australia's opposition to nuclear testing by China.

But Australia and the other members of the South Pacific Forum have a particular concern with French testing because it is not being conducted in France's metropolitan territory, but in the South Pacific.

Most countries in this region are small island states. For many years they have made clear their opposition to nuclear weapons. They have shown this year after year in the resolutions of the South Pacific Forum and, most clearly, in the creation of the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone. The Government of France is defying not only their wishes but their moral rights.

This action will call into question for many in the South Pacific the legitimacy of the French presence there.

The French Government has defended the environmental safety of the tests at Mururoa and it has alluded to the possibility that international scientists might observe the tests.

But the fact is that accidents happen. And no one can foresee the longer term dangers associated with possible leakage from the underground coral structures housing the tests.

The fact remains that if these tests are perfectly safe, they could be made perfectly well in France.

Condemnation of the French decision has not been confined to the fifteen members of the South Pacific Forum.

Critical statements have been issued by Belgium, Chile, Denmark, Indonesia, Ireland, Japan, Kenya, Luxembourg, Mexico, Norway, Peru, the Philippines, Korea, Russia, South Africa, and Switzerland. On 15 June the European Parliament in Strasbourg adopted a resolution expressing shock at the decision and urging France to reconsider. Canada and the United States have regretted the decision.

Australia's response has been strong and unequivocal. The Government has deplored the decision. We have frozen defence relations with France and we

will not engage in any defence activity which would in any way assist the testing program.

We have protested against the French decision in the International Atomic Energy Agency Board of Governors meeting in Vienna, and other international bodies, including the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva and the United Nations in New York.

Australia has a particular responsibility in this matter this year because we are Chair of the South Pacific Forum. I have been in close touch with my Forum colleagues about it.

On their behalf, I issued a statement condemning the decision and expressing our unequivocal opposition to it. I said that Forum leaders hoped that France will hear and take note of what the world is saying.

To make sure that France does hear, we proposed to send a delegation of members of the South Pacific Forum to Paris to put the views of Forum countries directly and unambiguously to the French Government.

Because of the limited time available, and in accordance with Forum practice, the delegation comprises the past, present and next forum chairs. So Senator Evans is leading the delegation.

He is accompanied by President Bernard Dowiyogo of Nauru and Mr Tsiamilili, a special envoy from the Government of Papua New Guinea, which takes over the Forum Chair in September. The New Zealand Minister for Justice, Mr Graham, and the Western Samoan Minister of Education, Ms Fiami, are also represented on the delegation, as is the Secretary General of the Forum, the Hon Jeremiah Tabai.

The delegation will meet the French Government later tonight, Paris time.

The passing of this resolution by the House will assist it to convey to the French Government the depth of Forum countries concerns.

When the delegation reports back on the results of its discussions early tomorrow morning, I plan to be in touch again quickly with my Forum colleagues about what next steps we will take.

The concerns of the Australian people about the French decision have been demonstrated clearly over recent days. I hope they will continue to be expressed and in ways which help bring home to the French Government how widespread is the opposition to these policies.

But, Mr Speaker, some important things need to be remembered in this debate and some have been lost sight of.

The Government's position in this matter - and I believe the position of most Australians - is not shaped by hostility towards France or the French people, or to France's role in the Pacific. It is shaped solely by our opposition to this specific policy of the Government of France to resume testing nuclear weapons in the South Pacific.

France, and Australians who have come from France, have made a valuable contribution to Australia.

I have spoken before of the opportunities which exist for French business in Australia and for Australian businesses in France. I have also said that we welcome constructive French participation in the South Pacific.

It is very important that the expressions of Australian concern about this French policy do not flow over into racist attacks on France or French people. It is this particular French Government policy which we object to.

It is important for Australians to remember that many French people object to this decision as well. A number of members of the French delegation to the European Parliament voted in favour of the resolution I referred to earlier.

All Members of this House will, I am sure, share the view that terrorist acts, like the arson reported to be the cause of the fire at the office of the Honorary French Consul in Perth on 17 June must be utterly rejected and condemned.

It would be a very sorry consequence if our opposition to an act which contravenes our every sense of fairness and decency, should erode these values in our own society. Such acts as that which occurred in Perth, the Government utterly condemns as both illegal and un-Australian. Such acts are not only objectionable but counter-productive to our cause.

Those with influential positions in the community, in politics and the media, must be aware of their responsibilities and when they voice their concerns be careful not to encourage acts of violence or acts which undermine the legitimacy and moral authority of Australia's protest.

It does not diminish our resentment of the French decision to understand exactly what it entails.

It should be a concern of all members that Australians have an accurate knowledge about the French proposals - not least because our protests will have more effect if they do not contain exaggerations and inaccuracies.

Our arguments will be more persuasive if they are based in reality and not irrational fear.

I doubt if there is any Australian who does not feel anger about the French decision. What we must take to the French Government is a collective

concerted response. The response of all the Australian people channelled through the best means available to us.

This decision to resume testing is a bad decision by the Government of France. It is bad because it endangers progress towards a world free of nuclear weapons. It is bad because it ignores the views of the people of the region in which the tests are being conducted. It is bad because it sets back so far the cause of constructive French participation in the South Pacific region. It is bad because it is a decision which is essentially self-absorbed rather than showing a wider vision.

It is important that this Parliament, representing the people of Australia, conveys clearly to Government of France the extent of our concern at this wilful and unnecessary decision by the Government of France.

I commend the motion to the House.

CANBERRA
19 JUNE 1995