



PRIME MINISTER

**SPEECH NOTES BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP
PRIME MINISTER'S WELCOME LUNCH FOR MEMBERS OF
THE CANBERRA COMMISSION, MONDAY 22 JANUARY 1996
ADMIRALTY HOUSE, SYDNEY**

- May I begin by formally thanking each of you for accepting my invitation to join this Canberra Commission on the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons
- I am very conscious of how busy you are, and far you have come to participate in this meeting
 - I am very grateful to you
- However, I am sure from your presence here that you all agree there can be few commitments more worth making than this
 - I would not have set up this Commission or asked you to take part if I did not believe your combined efforts will be able to make a significant contribution to one of the most pressing issues facing the international community
 - that is, how the world can remove the threat of nuclear weapons - weapons of mass destruction - so powerful that their use could destroy our civilization
- The Australian Government begins from what seems to us to be the unarguable proposition that the world would be a better, safer, saner place without such weapons
 - that is, if they did not exist
- But we have them and only three possibilities follow from that:
 - first, that they will be used

- second, that they will not be used but will be managed forever by wise, prudent and well-meaning governments and military forces
- or, third, that somehow we can agree to eliminate them
- The first possibility offers catastrophe to the human race
- The second requires us to make assumptions about the future which run completely counter to logic and experience
 - because if there is one thing of which we can be utterly confident, it is that the present relatively benign global situation in which only five countries have declared nuclear weapons, and are unlikely to use them offensively, will not obtain forever
 - : far more probable over time is the emergence of a more fractured, dangerous, world in which the restraints which have governed the strategic outlook since these weapons were invented no longer apply, and the possession of such weapons proliferates more generally to other states - and possibly even beyond state control
- That leaves only the third possibility
 - that somehow we begin, with care and caution and a clear-eyed sense of all the difficulties it involves, to move to eliminate such weapons completely
- That is a massively difficult task and the Australian Government is not naive about it
 - we have no illusions about the technical difficulties of solving the central problems of verification
 - and we acknowledge the political problems involved: uncertainty about the future and the accretion of fifty years of nuclear doctrine
 - nor do we imagine that a world without nuclear weapons will be a world without conflict
 - : so serious issues of security also need to be addressed along with the technical and diplomatic issues

- So it is in pursuit of that third possibility - what seems to us to be the only real option for the world - that we have invited you to join this Commission
- Because if the aim of a world without nuclear weapons is ever to be realised the issue has to be placed more firmly and centrally on the international agenda
 - : if that does not happen, we will inevitably see the familiar allowed to drift unchallenged into the future
 - : so that objective - to ensure that this issue is widely debated, and in depth - is one of the aims of this Commission
- But if that debate is to move ahead, the onus is on those favouring abolition to provide practical and serious ideas about how it can be done - and, most importantly, how it can be done in a way which actually enhances global security
- That is the other reason for establishing the Commission
- It is why we have invited all of you - from different backgrounds and different approaches - to participate in it
 - you bring to this task, collectively and individually, an unmatched experience in statesmanship, in nuclear and scientific issues, in diplomacy and in strategic analysis
 - we are convinced that if any group can address these issues in a fresh, persuasive and unconventional way, it exists here in this room
- We are not looking for easy statements of principle in your report, or for words which are agreed for the sake of getting agreement
 - what we hope for is that you will come to grips with the hardest, and most intractable issues, and show how these must be addressed
- Many of you have spent much of your professional lives engaged with these issues and I don't intend to offer you advice now about them
- But I do want to say something about "why now?" and "why here - in Australia?"

- In Singapore last week, I gave a speech in which I said that it seemed to me that we were living through the greatest period of change in the world since the emergence of the nation state
- The end of the Cold War has freed up the global system in an unprecedented and unexpected way
- What comes next is very uncertain - but it will not be uncertain for long
- Within a very short time, the world will adjust and settle into new grooves, from which it will be very difficult to dislodge it
- But for the time being we have an unparalleled opportunity - and an unprecedented responsibility - to look afresh at what have seemed to be intractable problems
- And, of these, possibly the most intractable has been the threat of nuclear weapons
- When the Cold War ended, most people in the world breathed a sigh of relief and assumed that the nightmare of the nuclear threat had disappeared along with the Berlin Wall
 - the strength of the international reaction to the French Government's decision to lift its moratorium on nuclear testing stemmed in large measure from this unexpected and unwelcome reminder of a danger which many people assumed had passed
- We in Australia believed it was important for all countries to focus attention not just on the symptom - continued nuclear testing by France and China - but on this larger cause
- Why should Australia be involved in an exercise like this?
 - we are not a nuclear power
 - we are geographically distant from the major areas of nuclear tension
 - and we are an old and committed ally of the United States and have benefitted from the protection of extended deterrence
- The answer is that we are convinced that in the new international environment our **security** and the security of our friends, as well as the people of the world at large, will be better served if we can eliminate

nuclear weapons, as we have moved to eliminate other weapons of mass destruction

- Australia does not have any proprietorial or exclusive interest in nuclear disarmament
 - or any preconceived outcome in mind from the deliberations of this group
 - because if progress is to be made - and I believe it can be - it will be by the combined and relentless efforts of many governments and groups and individuals
 - not just expressing by our hopes and fears, but by coming to grips rigorously with all the difficult issues involved
- I am convinced the time is right - and, of course, the people are right - for the Canberra Commission to make a major intellectual and political contribution to this work
- Gareth Evans, personally, and the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, including Ambassador Richard Butler, the convenor of this Commission, have a long record of achievement on global and regional arms control issues, including their contribution to the conclusion of the Chemical Weapons Convention and the work on the CTBT
- They will be ready, through your Secretariat, to give you whatever assistance you require
- Let me end by again expressing my personal thanks to all of you for your participation in the Commission - and let me welcome you formally to Australia

ends.