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PRIME MINISTER

13/95

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP

CONCLUSION OF THE FRENCH NUCLEAR TESTING PROGRAM

The announcement by the French Government that it has concluded its nuclear testing program in the South Pacific brings to an end a program which should never have started.

Those six tests put at grave risk the cause of international disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation, flew in the face of France's international obligations and posed unacceptable risks to the people of the South Pacific.

I welcome President Chirac's renewed commitment to sign the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty and a genuinely Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty in 1996.

But these measures and the conclusion of its testing program do not end France's obligations to the nations of the South Pacific.

Like the other members of the South Pacific Forum, Australia wants France to close its testing facilities, retaining only those required for environmental monitoring. Australia also wants France to provide access for the international community to all data and sites so an independent and comprehensive assessment of the effects of its testing can be made.

Australia's opposition to the French tests, as I have consistently said, is not the result of any hostility to France itself or the people of France, or to France's role in the Pacific. We have been opposed to this single indefensible decision to abandon its own moratorium on nuclear testing.

Beyond the immediate and urgent need to conclude a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty this year, Australia now looks for a new commitment from France and the other nuclear weapon states to meet their obligations under Article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty for genuine steps towards complete nuclear disarmament.

No-one who heard any of the members of the Canberra Commission on the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons speak last week can doubt how urgent that need is, nor that, with the Cold War over, it is now an achievable goal which can increase global security for all countries.

CANBERRA
30 January 1996

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