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PRIME MINISTER

24 September 1996

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER
THE HON. JOHN HOWARD MP
UNVEILING OF THE COMMEMORATIVE PLAQUE MARKING THE 57TH
ANNIVERSARY OF THE FIRST MENZIES' WAR CABINET MEETING
VICTORIA BARRACKS, MELBOURNE**

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To my ministerial colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, I particularly acknowledge the presence of Mrs Buckley the widow of the late Colonel John Buckley.

As you've just heard, the idea of unveiling a plaque or of constructing a plaque to commemorate the meetings of the Australian War Cabinet in Victoria Barracks in Melbourne during World War II was the brain child of Colonel Buckley. And Dr Ross Bastiaan, who is renowned for the work that he's done all around the world in constructing plaques to commemorate the deeds of valour of Australian service personnel in all theatres of war, is very well known to the service community, in particular, and the Australian community in general.

Ross Bastiaan who put together today's plaque has, through purely voluntary efforts, constructed and commissioned scores of plaques all around the world and three years ago I had the personal opportunity, as a member of the pilgrimage on the western front in 1993, to be present when eleven of Dr Bastiaan's plaques in France and Belgium were unveiled.

But today's plaque brings to mind the meetings of the Australian War Cabinet here in Melbourne during the darkest days of World War II. It reminds us of the contribution of political figures of that time including, in particular, the late John Curtin who was Prime Minister of Australia for most of World War II and before him Robert Menzies who was Prime Minister when World War II broke out. It also reminds us of the contribution of so many Australians of all walks of life to that war effort. It reminds us of the tremendous challenge that faced Australia and of the way in which the Australian community united across the normal divides of different backgrounds and different political attitudes to fight a common threat and a common enemy. And how, with the cooperation of our allies during those darkest times of World War II, we were able to be successful against the Japanese.

And it is important, ladies and gentlemen, as we grow further away in time from those events to remember them as part of our history. There is a growing interest by current generations of Australians in the many great events of this century that have shaped the type and the destiny of the Australian nation. Today's plaque, today's meeting I think Friday will mark the 57th anniversary of the first meeting of the War Cabinet in these rooms here in Melbourne presided over by Robert Gordon Menzies as then Prime Minister of Australia. It is an occasion to pay tribute to Australia's war leaders, but of course also and very specially, to pay tribute to the men and women who fought on the various battle fields of World War II and saved Australia from invasion and preserved the way of life that we now all cherish so very much.

I'm delighted that the Cabinet of 1996 has chosen the War Cabinet rooms here in Melbourne as the first occasion on which the Cabinet of the new Coalition Government has met in Melbourne since the election. Let me say that the new Government, my Government, will make it a habit to take Cabinet meetings around Australia. Whilst we will have most of them in Canberra we will also have a number of them in Sydney and at various times in Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth and later on all of the State capitals and later on to some of the major provincial centres of Australia. It is appropriate that in country as geographically large as Australia that the nerve centre of national political decision making not always be in Canberra, that it be in other parts of Australia and I think it is appropriate and I am delighted, ladies and gentlemen, that this first meeting is taking place here in Victoria Barracks in the old War Cabinet room.

I have very great pleasure in participating in this little ceremony. It's a ceremony that reminds us of a critical moment in our history. It's an occasion to pay tribute to those who led us then and of the contribution that they made to the type of Australia that we now have. Thank you very much.