



12

PRIME MINISTER

22 March 1997

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER
THE HON JOHN HOWARD MP
ADDRESS AT THE CARE AUSTRALIA
10th ANNIVERSARY DINNER
GRAND HYATT, MELBOURNE**

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Thank you very much to Malcolm Fraser, the Chairman of Care Australia; to my Parliamentary colleagues, Kim Beazley, the Leader of the Opposition, Robert Hill, the Leader of the Government in the Senate, Barry Jones, the National President of the Australian Labor Party, to other very distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

Can I say firstly how very happy I am to share this very special occasion marking the 10th anniversary of the establishment of Care Australia. It is an opportunity to reflect upon the selfless contribution of so many people who work for a magnificent and generous organisation in the relief of the very unhappy circumstances of people all around the world.

Care is an organisation that as Malcolm mentioned began in the United States at the end of World War II. I didn't know until tonight when Malcolm mentioned it, and it shows that you still keep learning things from former Prime Ministers, that Care had been instrumental in such a major way in breaking the Berlin air lift.

To those of us in recent years Care of course is, I suppose, ineradicably associated with the suffering of people particularly in Africa. And it's an occasion such as this for me on behalf of the Government to thank those men and women of Australia who have gone to these very troubled parts of the world, given of their effort, in some cases given of their health and their lives to relieve the suffering of others.

And none of course has been a better and properly honoured example of that than Malcolm's own daughter, Phoebe, who's with us tonight whose contribution has been quite remarkable. But I know that she would not want herself to be singled out, but she's but one of many Australians who have done such magnificent work.

Care is an organisation that has sustained by the generous help and the generous donations of people in Australia. It's an organisation that has had amongst its executive officers people with whom I've had a great deal of connection. And I can't let an occasion like tonight go by without remarking on the presence of Tony Eggleton who did such magnificent work for Care. Tony and Malcolm and I, of course, go back a long way and I'm so delighted to be here tonight and to be in company of both of them. And can I say very genuinely how much I respect what Malcolm Fraser has put back into the community since he ceased his active parliamentary political days. He has set a wonderful example of community service and it's one that I respect enormously.

And an occasion like this, of course, is an opportunity to reflect upon the importance of non-government organisations in the provision of overseas aid. It's also an opportunity to reflect upon the ongoing importance of official government assistance. Australia provides, and I acknowledge the point that the Chairman has made about it not quite being enough, but Australia nonetheless provides in the order of \$1.6 billion of official overseas assistance. And I guess many of you would know that the country that receives as a nation the largest single portion of that is Papua New Guinea. And at a time when the affairs of that country are occupying the attention of the Government and occupying the attention of many Australians, it's opportune and I think appropriate for me to say to those in the Australian community who criticise the fact that we have any overseas aid at all, let alone argue about the particular level of it, it's an opportunity and I think it's right to say that if we are concerned about the stability of that country and if we have concerns about its immediate future in current circumstances we can only imagine what might be the case if that country had not, over the years, been provided with significant levels of aid by Australia. It is not only an exercise in humanitarian assistance of relatively wealthy nations such as Australia to give official assistance, but it is also a matter of the long term self-interest of this country to give intelligent overseas aid. At the present time there's an inquiry being conducted into the structure and character and nature of overseas aid chaired by the former Chairman of Woolworths, Mr Paul Simons. And the Government will have that report and will be responding to that in the near future. But let me say to all of you that whilst there will be debates about the actual level of aid, and there will be proper submissions put to my Government as they were put to the predecessor government of Australia, I think I can say without any fear of political contradiction that official overseas aid in significant proportions will remain a very important element of Australian budgets for years into the future.

When we think of non-government organisations, of course, we think of the generosity around Australia of literally hundreds of thousands of individuals who give, in many cases small amounts but for them proportionately very large amounts, to help organisations such as Care and the other great non-government organisations. We also think of the very generous corporate support. And I want to acknowledge the contribution of corporate Australia and the philanthropy of corporate Australia to organisations such as Care.

In the context of the Government's 'work for the dole' scheme I have spoken often in recent weeks at what I call the notion of mutual obligation within our society. And I've expressed the belief that a society such as our own will only hold together

cohesively and effectively if we are underpinned by a pattern of mutual obligations. We provide assistance for those within our own community who through no fault of their own need assistance, and on occasions it is not unreasonable that something be asked in return from them and that is a principle that I've articulated in relation to the 'work for the dole' scheme. And I don't think it is wrong for me to articulate that same principle in relation to the obligations of those in the community, including in corporate Australia and those in the more affluent sections of the Australian community who can afford to do so, that a principle of mutual obligation exists in relation to their support for and contributions towards worthy causes to organisations like Care.

Australia provides for its corporate citizens a climate of unrivalled political economic and legal stability. Quite legitimately, companies and their managers will complain about this or that government policy, whoever is in power, or this or that set of economic circumstances. But if you look around the world there are few countries in which it is easier to do business. There are few countries in which, in overall terms, there is a more beckoning business environment and business climate. And I have no reluctance, particularly on an occasion such as tonight, I have no reluctance at all in asserting in that context the principle of mutual obligation. There is an obligation on those within our community - I don't state it in any kind of hectoring or preaching sense, but I state it perhaps, to some degree, in a self interest sense so far as the corporations are concerned - there is an obligation to make contributions to organisations such as Care. And of course tonight's magnificent dinner marking the 10th anniversary of the foundation of Care Australia is supported by so many Australian companies and so many Australian individuals who've given very generously of their time and their resources, of their money over the years to support Care.

I had the opportunity earlier this morning of spending a fascinating hour with the former Chairman of the American Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Colin-Powell. And he remarked upon the fact that the world has changed so much over the past few years with the collapse of communism and the end of the Cold War that we no longer have the enemy we'd had for most of our lifetime. And that that rivalry between the communist world and the capitalist world, that rivalry between east and west, which had really patterned and determined and conditioned our responses and our attitudes over such a long period of time, the disappearance of that had left almost a political void, almost a political vacuum. But we also agreed that it had given the world a tremendous opportunity and had given many people a great sense of hope about our capacity to turn our attention to the relief of suffering and unhappiness and distress in particular parts of the world. And none of us, not only on occasions such as this but none of us generally can of course be other than impressed very heavily by the enormous gaps between the rich and poor around the world as well as the growing evidence unhappily of those gaps within our own society. And the contribution that Care makes to the relief of human misery, the contribution that it makes to the provision of resources that will generate self help and self support and providing people with a way of lifting the pall of dependency on others and generating hope and optimism about their own lives and their own future is of course a very, very worthy aspiration now, as it always has been, for mankind.

And whatever may be the difficulties within our own domestic economy, whatever arguments we may have about whether this or that way of doing things could be improved within Australia. We are amongst the most fortunate, the most blessed and the most happy and stable and wealthy of societies in the world. And that does put a moral obligation as well as an obligation of long term pragmatism upon the Government of Australia and upon the citizens of Australia to make proper provision for programmes and organisations that are determined over a period of time to help those who need help most. And the challenge is immense. The marvels of modern communications have dramatised human suffering into the living rooms of Australia and the living rooms of the world and the living rooms of the affluent in a way that hasn't been the case in earlier years and all of us, as a consequence, are very conscious of that. But of course there is that danger of disaster or 'poverty fatigue' as I think the experts have called it, that danger that we see so much of it that we become numb, almost indifferent to it. And that is why we need organisations such as Care to intelligently mobilise on an ongoing basis for concern of the community and the concern of the Australian people.

But ladies and gentlemen can I say how much I respect and admire the work of Care. Can I remark upon what it has achieved in Australia over the last 10 years. Can I thank on behalf of my Government, and I know on behalf I'm sure of the Opposition as well, can I thank Malcolm Fraser and all those who've worked for Care, who've given their energy and their talents and their commitment. It is a noble cause to help those who suffer and it is a noble cause to reach out and gather up the less fortunate and in many cases the wretched and underprivileged within our world and within our society and Care has been in the forefront of doing that in a practical, efficient, effective manner. I salute their contribution to mankind and I wish Care Australia continued success and continued achievement in their great mission of relieving human misery and promoting human progress.

Thank you.